

# COMM-ENTARY

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39th edition 2018-2019



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## Letter from the Editors

Dear reader,

Welcome to the 2018-19 edition of *Comm-Entary*, the UNH Department of Communication's undergraduate research journal. Over the past 38 years, this journal has strived to showcase exemplary student work on topics of media, rhetoric, and language and social interaction. This year's edition explores these topics in depth with compelling modern perspectives from UNH's innovative students.

We are delighted to present sixteen examples of outstanding student work within the communication discipline. We encourage you to read the compelling arguments relating to communication and explore a variety of stimulating topics. This year, one of *Comm-Entary*'s ambitions was to highlight a wider range of disciplines within the communication field. This edition showcases not only written work, but a small selection of multimedia productions as well.

Our past three editions have garnered attention from readers in 23 countries and 6 continents. We are thrilled and humbled by the opportunity to share our work with scholars from around the world.

As always, we would like to thank the dedicated individuals who made this issue possible: our contributive faculty advisor Professor R. Michael Jackson, all of the students who submitted work, the professors in the Communication department for inspiring students strive for excellence, and of course a special thanks to our diligent team of student editors. None of this would be possible without all of your hard work!

We are so proud of this year's edition of *Comm-Entary*, and we hope you enjoy it as much as we do.

Sincerely, Kristiana Osborne and Ellie Humphreys, Editors-in-Chief

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Figure 1. The Crystal Gems Cast

## “We Are the Crystal Gems”: Themes of Identity within *Steven Universe*

by Hannah Baum

### Introduction

*Steven Universe* is a critically acclaimed animated television show airing on Cartoon Network, which depicts the fantastic adventures of a young boy through its primary narrative, while simultaneously addressing progressive topics in regards to universal acceptance. Premiering in 2013, *Steven Universe* was created by Rebecca Sugar, a storyboard artist and writer for the beloved animated series *Adventure Time* (Min, 2017). Similar to *Adventure Time*, *Steven Universe*

portrays the antics of an excitable, adventurous young boy who attempts to uncover hidden information regarding an absent parent (Framke, 2016). While Finn struggles to discover who his father is in *Adventure Time*, Steven seeks to better understand the legacy of his extraterrestrial rebel mother.

Steven lives in a coastal resort town called Beach City, with three intergalactic beings named Garnet, Amethyst, and Pearl (Min, 2017). They are part of an alien species known as Gems, and were friends to his mother, another Gem called Rose Quartz. Rose Quartz and the three other Gems were members of a rebel group called the Crystal Gems, who reject the social structures of their home planet and protect Earth from becoming a Gem colony. Garnet, Amethyst, and Pearl act as guardians towards Steven and accompany him on adventures that concern the safety of the planet, often engaging in battles with enemy Gems.

*Steven Universe* boldly weaves a rich assortment of subjects pertaining to identity within its story, including sexuality, race, gender identity, gender roles and class, which can be analyzed in terms of gaystreaming, stereotyping, representation, othering, and hegemony.

### **Gaystreaming: The Normalization of Homosexuality**

Gems do not subscribe to the idea of gender, but are coded as female and all use female pronouns. Because there is such a substantial number of “female” characters, lesbian relationships are recurrent. Lillian Min of *Bitch Media* notes that “lesbianism isn’t considered strange or abnormal” (2017) on the show; it is meant to be common among the alien Gems because they are all interpreted as female. The most perpetual homosexual relationship is that of Ruby and Sapphire. Their love for each other is so strong that they consistently stay in their fused form, a single being called Garnet. The show depicts countless scenes of the two Gems kissing,

and even shows their wedding ceremony, which was a huge milestone in representation of the LGBTQ+ community. It also advocates a sense of positivity towards same-sex marriage and their right to love freely.

There are also unofficial relationships within the show that hint at lesbian romance, including that of Pearl and Rose Quartz, Pearl and the Mystery Girl, and perhaps even the toxic relationship between Jasper and Lapis. The show's pervasiveness of homosexuality attempts to reject prejudices against it, and promote homonormativity. Homosexual characters are traditionally seen as being unusual in television or film and have common tropes attached to them, such as "[needing to come] out of the closet [or] being mistaken as gay or straight" (Padva, 2008), like with Ellen DeGeneres's character on *Ellen*. Unfortunately, gay characters are often stereotyped as being "entertainingly flamboyant" (Ng, 2013) comic relief, but the strategic concept of gaystreaming seeks to "integrate [LGBTQ+ culture] into dominant institution[s]" (p. 260) and make it more prevalent within the media. *Steven Universe* embraces queerness and "goes out of its way to honor the experiences of people regardless of their race, body type, or place of origin." (Opam, 2017)

### **Portrayals of Racial and Ethnic Minorities**

*Steven Universe* is filled with people of color within its story and behind the scenes amid its voice cast. Over half of the show's voice actors are people of color, with Steven being the only main character that is voiced by a Caucasian actor (Plane, 2018). Garnet, Amethyst, and Pearl are composed of a mix of Black and Asian voice actresses. The racial diversity within the cast is of tremendous importance towards an industry that is described as being whitewashed, with Caucasian voice actors getting hired far more frequently than voice actors of color (Coghill, 2016).

The show itself has a wide range of racial and ethnic backgrounds that are visible within the residents of Beach City, who all have an assortment of different skin tones and accents. Two secondary characters named Connie and Lars are members of two ethnic groups that are underrepresented on television. Connie, who is Steven's dear friend, has been confirmed by writer Matt Burnett as being Indian-American (Plane, 2018). Her heritage is not directly mentioned in the show, but she has a Hindu surname that sparked discussion within the fanbase (Plane, 2018). Another character named Lars, who is a disgruntled donut shop employee, was once depicted baking an ube roll with Steven. Ube is a popular Filipino cake made from purple yam (Yarmie, 2018). Curious fans reached out to *Steven Universe's* supervising director Ian Jones-Quartey on Twitter and asked him if Lars was Filipino (Yarmie, 2018). Jones-Quartey confirmed the rumors, and Filipino viewers who had recognized the cake were absolutely thrilled at their representation on the show.

Although *Steven Universe* makes commendable strides towards inclusion of racial minorities, it does have some problematic racial stereotyping. Garnet and Bismuth, in particular, have some heavy racial coding. Garnet has physical characteristics that are stereotypically equated with African American women, which include her large lips, voluptuous lower body, and Afro hairstyle. She also has a deep shade of red as her skin hue, which is associated with dark skin. She is oversexualized when she performs a Fusion Dance with other Gems, where they combine into a single, powerful being. In the dance, she rolls and thrusts her hips, then spreads her legs apart at the finale to suggest an air of eroticism. It is a common misconception to assume that African Americans are hypersexual (Dines et al, 82), particularly through involvement and expertise in the field of dance.



Bismuth bears racially coded traits as well. She wears rainbow dreadlocks, which are traditionally an African American hairstyle. Bismuth is also quite stocky and can be very loud and aggressive, which, when combined with the dreadlocks, promote the offensive trope of a heavysset, angry, sassy African American woman (Kingston, 2016).

### **Gender Identity and Gender Expression: Pronouns and Attire**

*Steven Universe* also addresses issues regarding gender identity, particularly in the cases of Stevonnie and in the gender codings of different Gems. Stevonnie is a fusion between Steven and Connie that combines two binary genders into a single entity. Stevonnie is addressed with “they” pronouns and has physical characteristics of both males and females, which are most notable in their hourglass body shape and facial stubble. Stevonnie’s presence in the show addresses hegemonic views of gender, while promoting acceptance towards nonbinary identification. That is, a person can express themselves in a way that deviates from the rigidity of a male-female system and blend them together. Additionally, *Steven Universe* addresses androgyny and masculinity that is expressed in the outward appearances of women, and more specifically, lesbians. There are countless Gems that appear masculine, even though they all use female pronouns. Gems like Ruby, Peridot, Jasper, Bismuth, and Topaz appear more butch in their physical presentation because they have greater muscle mass and they wear pants, compared to the feminine characters that wear dresses. All of these Gems were once enemies to the main characters, suggesting the threat that hegemonic masculinity has upon women and society as a whole.

While *Steven Universe* is accepting of butch and androgynous gender expressions within the gay community, it subtly others them as well, suggesting that some lesbians must look female

and others must look masculine. It is a very dangerous and offensive stereotype to assume that all lesbian relationships contain a partner that represents a woman and another that represents a man. Animated TV sitcoms spanning from 1990 into the 2000s contain social critiques of different gender and sexual identities in the form of crude jokes and misrepresentations, especially in *Family Guy* (Padva, 2008). *Family Guy* reinforces hegemonic heterosexuality into mainstream media by making queer characters seem abnormal; the show pokes fun at a transgender woman named Ida and homosexual dog named Jasper. The show also contains the stereotype of masculine and feminine lesbians, with butch lesbians portrayed as tough, having deep voices, and being aggressive, while femme lesbians physically resemble more traditional qualities of femininity.

### **The Paradigm Shift of Gender Roles**

*Steven Universe* has countless depictions of non-traditional gender roles, with a heavy emphasis on females being fighters. The Gems, which are interpreted as females, are all ruthless warriors that have their own personalized weapons. Steven's friend Connie is a sword fighter; and in a scene with the Watermelon Stevens, a female watermelon goes off to battle while her male partner stays behind (Rader, 2016). Conversely, Steven is essentially the antithesis of a typical hegemonically masculine male protagonist. Gauntlett (2008) expands upon popular representations on what men are expected to be: "[they] are supposed to be stiff - [...] they have to show their armored self to the world all [of] the time" (p. 10) and mask their true emotions. By contrast, Steven is extremely emotional and sensitive, which could be a sign of weakness according to customary characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. Steven also uses a pink shield in his battles and has magical healing powers (Brammer, 2017), which are roles that are associated

with passivity, tenderness, and femininity. Luckily, *Steven Universe* presents a colorful world where women are strong and have intoxicating levels of girl power, and men are embraced for having more sensitive sides.

### **Set in Stone: The Gem Hierarchy**

*Steven Universe* reflects upon the issues of sexism and homophobia through the integration of the social hierarchy for the Gems of Homeworld. Each Gem on Homeworld is assigned with a specific set of duties and responsibilities that they are required to fulfill throughout their lives; that is, each Gem has a predetermined role from the moment that they come into existence.

The rulers of all of the Gems are known as the Diamond Authority, “[who have] asserted themselves as all-controlling, godlike leaders” (Gebrechirstos, 2017) that enforce a militaristic caste system throughout their home planet and their cosmic colonies. The Diamond Authority are four supreme beings known as Diamonds, and they each have a distinct color and personality. White Diamond is celestial and subtly threatening, Yellow Diamond is stern and temperamental, Blue Diamond is overly emotional and Pink Diamond is naive. Each Diamond is regarded with a higher level power depending on the number of planets that they control; White Diamond has the most and Pink Diamond has the fewest. Even within the top tier of the Gem Hierarchy, there is essentially a sub-hierarchy among the four leaders, which places a greater sense of importance on the Diamond who “has more.” In that, there is a correlation between the significance of market production or perhaps even a larger yearly salary, which are represented by the planets.

There are roughly four predominant classes beneath the Diamonds, which include Aristocrats, Soldiers, Artisans and Hand-Servants. Aristocratic gems like Sapphires, Lapis Lazulis,

Agates and Aquamarines are considered to be very rare and serve as diplomats in the Diamonds' courts. The Aristocrats often have special abilities that the Diamonds use for their own benefits, like Sapphire's power to see into the future. It is worth noting that the Aristocratic Gems are heavily coded as being femme, due to their common attire of dresses and skirts.

Gems like Jaspers, Amethysts, Topazes, and Rubies are soldiers or bodyguards, and are tasked with protecting Gems that are superior to them. Soldier Gems are often very irritable and often express their anger through outbursts. Their artistic designs are coded as more masculine than the Diamonds and Aristocrats, in that they have a bulkier muscle mass and wear pants instead of dresses. The designs and temperaments of the soldier Gems suggest that men are prone to anger, and express that emotion in a physical manner. In order to increase their strength in battle, soldier Gems will sometimes fuse together to create a large, unstoppable version of themselves. They are only allowed to fuse with Gems that are identical to themselves. If a soldier Gem were to fuse with a Gem from a different social positioning, they would create a hybrid fusion and be subsequently destroyed, or "shattered" out of disapproval from other Gems. When Sapphire, an aristocrat, and Ruby, a common soldier, end up fusing together to form Garnet for the first time, they are ridiculed and called disgusting by the other Gems. Ruby is threatened for having the audacity to fuse with a high ranking member of Blue Diamond's court. Their hybrid fusion represents homosexuality, which, in turn, is characterized as being disgusting according to the dominating standards of heteronormativity.

The Artisan Gems are Bismuths and Peridot. Bismuths are weapon makers and create equipment for the Diamonds to use in their conquests for obtaining new colonies, and Peridot is a technician that installs equipment and Gem technologies on their territories. Bismuths, like

soldier gems, have a very hefty, muscular body form which codes them as being masculine.

Peridots appear to be slightly more ambiguous in terms of gender coding, but wear a specialized suit of armor that leans towards the pole of masculinity on the gender spectrum. The masculine forms of Bismuths and Peridots, combined with their physically demanding professions, alludes to the professional gender gap, in that only men are capable of being involved with manual labor and women should focus on pink-collar work.

The lowest ranking Gems are Pearls, and they are personal hand servants to the Diamonds. They are directly referred to as “things” or “objects” in the show. In an upcoming episode titled “Diamond Days,” Pearl approaches Steven with a bag and says, “I’m only here because I’m bringing your things... and they [Homeworld] consider me one of your things (Brewster, Morris & Sugar, 2018). Similarly, in the episode “Back to the Barn,” Peridot ridicules Pearl for attempting to help construct a drill. Peridot laughs at Steven for questioning why Pearl cannot help them, and says that “Pearls aren’t *for* this! They’re for standing around, and looking nice, and holding your stuff for you, right? [...] She’s a made-to-order servant just like the hundreds of other Pearls being flaunted around back on Homeworld” (Johnston, Liu & Sugar, 2015). Peridot’s comments are extremely discriminatory towards Pearl, but it is important to mention that Pearls have very delicate and feminine exterior features compared to masculine soldier Gems and Artisans. Their lower rank alludes towards current struggles towards gender equality. The show directly states that Pearls are “things” that are “meant to stand around” as a status symbol for prominent Gems, which corresponds to sexist discourses that proclaim that women are arm candy to men. The Gem Class System is extremely metaphorical in regards to critiquing current problems pertaining to gender inequality and anti-gay discourse.

While the areas of gender, race, and sexuality are fluid, the socio-economic aspect of a Gem's identity is set in stone. The simple hierarchy of different colored rocks is a lighter, easily-digestible commentary on our own social structures. On each planetary colony, the Gem Caste System is replicated and the Gems just accept their prescribed duties. That is, there is a basic, stable socio-economic structure set in place, but gender, race, and sexuality are in flux.

### **Conclusion**

*Steven Universe* is a beloved animated series that was Cartoon Network's most-watched series premiere in 2013, among the demographic of children ages six to eleven (TV BY THE NUMBERS, 2013). It has a very diverse audience that admires the show so much that it is a frequent topic across Twitter. The fanbase also produces art on creative websites like Tumblr and Deviantart. The show undertakes a tremendously radical task: to eliminate prejudice and create a world that embraces identities that diverge from hegemonic ideologies pertaining to sexuality, race, gender identity, gender roles, and class. This paper observed *Steven Universe*'s plotline from seasons one to four and part of season five; the latter portion was a special event that was released shortly after on December 17th, 2018. The event, titled "Diamond Days," addressed speculative fan theories that had been swirling about since July and was therefore wildly popular from prolonged anticipation. On March 28th, 2019, *Steven Universe* won a GLAAD award in the category of Outstanding Kids & Family Programming, which applauded it for fair representation of the LGBTQ+ community (Aguilar, 2019). It won a Peabody Award on April 18th, 2019 and a Primetime Emmy back in 2018 (Puc, 2019), making it a three-time award winning series. Clearly, the show makes tremendous progress in regards to inclusion, but it does contain several cases of

stereotyping, othering and hegemony. Despite its problems, *Steven Universe* will continue to break boundaries and amass cult status among its fans.

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# Media Analysis of “Nikes” by Frank Ocean

## by Emily Bourne

### BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Although he has spent most of his famous life widely secluded from the public eye, Frank Ocean’s musical persona has become widely esteemed throughout popular culture today. Growing up in New Orleans and launching his career just before hurricane Katrina devastated his hometown, Ocean decided to move to Los Angeles after the disaster in 2005 with just \$1,000 in his pocket. His employment as a ghostwriter for popular artists took off and allowed him to make a name for himself and further connect with established artist Tyler, The Creator as well as the rest of the Odd Future rap/hip-hop collective. Unsatisfied in his ghostwriting affairs, Ocean then began writing and producing music for his own catalog as an artist and has since dropped his first mixtape *Nostalgia*, *Ultra*, Grammy award-winning *Channel Orange*, video album *Endless*, and his most recent project, *Blonde*, of 2016 (“Frank Ocean Biography”).

*Blonde* was released one day after the debut of *Endless*, Ocean’s last project signed with Def Jam Recordings. *Blonde* served as a triumphant and deliberate ‘parting of ways’ from Def Jam after a long and arduous battle with the company to buy back his musical autonomy and the rights to his past releases (Jacobson). *Blonde* quickly became Ocean’s most popular and most publicly praised album, reportedly selling over a quarter of a million copies within its first week (“Frank Ocean Already Made \$1 Million By Going Independent”). The album was also awarded an RIAA platinum certification in less than two years after its release (Cowen). Whereas *Channel Orange* allowed Ocean to thrive in the spotlight, reminisce on past experiences, and hint at his

marginalized identity, *Blonde* looked at a deeper, more emotionally free side of the artist.

Ocean's liberation from the trials of the popular music industry prompted him to delve deeply into a more thorough recollection of his relationships, sexuality, and emotional wellbeing (Simons).

Just hours prior to the release of the album in its entirety, Ocean dropped "Nikes," the project's first and only single (Minsker). Within seconds of the song's introduction, synthesized chord tones and dry, distant beat structures evoke perceptions of melancholia and nostalgia. Upon entry of sung lyrics, Ocean's augmented vocal arrangement recollects experiences of fame, drugs, and sex through the use of metaphors and innuendos. Listeners would become further aware of the song's depth when viewing its accompanying music video (Lebon). Although directed by famous documentary producer and filmmaker Tyrone Lebon, the video supposedly "interpreted the song as a stream of Frank's consciousness - rich with snippets of stories, emotions and ideas" (Kim). Incorporating a pervasive narration by Ocean as well as several clips of the artist among a montage of calculated footage, the short film further expands on Ocean's lived beliefs and experiences as described within the song.

Ocean also incorporates symbolism throughout this project to create further depth within the song's application to current popular culture. Although Ocean is using Nike shoes as a metaphor for consumerism and materialistic ideals, Nike's history in being a powerful advocate for difficult cultural issues is used strategically in this context. Nike has long been known to support marginalized individuals and groups of people through their *Just Do It* campaigns, as we have recently seen within their 2018 advertisement featuring former NFL star Colin Kaepernick, who gave up his career to protest with the Black Lives Matter movement (Tyler). Thus, the use of

Nike throughout the layered circumstances of Ocean's vision was deliberate and is meant to resonate with the viewer on various levels.

Furthermore, "Nikes" is layered with conceptual attributes surrounding issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality within popular media. Ocean's experience living as a public figure whose personal identity lies within several overlapping minority groups holds a dramatic impact on the lyricism and cinematography found within the song and its accompanying music video. Throughout the entirety of the production, Ocean aims to challenge hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity, build awareness for issues of race based on systemic pressures and socio-cultural mechanisms of control, and counter media framing and social constructionism regarding fame and wealth in America. Throughout these matters, Ocean also aims to incorporate an intersectional approach to more realistically and inclusively characterize the issues described.

## ANALYSIS

### GENDER AND SEXUALITY

Ocean frames his discussion surrounding gender and sexuality on countering present cultural hegemonic ideals. Hegemony is known within media studies as "the power of dominance that one social group holds over others" (Lull 34). Ocean is openly bisexual and lives on a constantly shifting spectrum of gender identity (Odd Future). He identifies as male but is often fluid in his public expression of masculinity and femininity. Currently, within United States culture, there is widespread acceptance of hegemonic masculinity, which encourages men to suppress any stereotypical femme behaviors and personality traits, and hegemonic heteronormativity, which embraces heterosexuality as an accepted default while inhibiting the advancement of the LGBTQIAA+ community. These are features of American society that Frank Ocean stands in

opposition to and aims to address and challenge through visuals and vocal attributes included within the “Nikes” music video.

Ocean’s use of vocals within this piece is especially significant when discussing the issue of gender nonconformity. Within the song, Ocean introduces two overlapping distortions of his voice; a higher pitched tone encompassing feminine character, which sings the songs deep, more emotional lyrics, and a lower pitched tone encompassing masculine character, which makes surface level comments surrounding the content of the video (Lebon). Ocean uses these two involved voices to signify the two stereotypically gendered positions of his overall identity. Ocean’s two sides are consistent with the lower tone’s assertion, “I got two versions, I got two versions” made at the beginning of the video (Lebon). Although the content nature of the voices proves widely different, their use in overlap is significant in Oceans declaration that an individual's feminine and masculine personas can and should coexist within a person’s lived experiences.

The visuals used within “Nikes” also aim to promote gender nonconformity. In terms of countering hegemonic masculinity, Ocean uses himself as an example of the interaction between feminine and masculine behaviors. In one scene, he is filmed sitting in front of a car while sipping out of a styrofoam cup, a modern cultural artifact commonly associated with drinking codeine. These features serve as two distinct, stereotypically masculine behaviors. Seconds later, closeup frames of Ocean’s face are captured, and he is seen doused in glitter while wearing vibrant eyeliner, two stereotypically feminine behaviors. Also presented within the video, is a clip of two naked individuals almost unidentifiable from one another, laying amongst a pile of money. The defining difference in how these individuals are portrayed within the visual is where their genitals are covered - one is presumably a male and the other female. Though the male character wears

pink nail polish, and the female character has a shaved head (Lebon). These scenes are symbolic of how gender identity can overlap within a person's overall state of being.

In terms of expressions used within the song and video aimed to counter hegemonic heteronormativity, the use of video clips and Oceans distorted lower voice within "Nikes" is purposeful and holds great meaning. In the video, Ocean's lower voice raves amongst visuals of prominently sexualized strippers, but the dancers presumed biological sex proceeds to switch from male to female whilst the individuals flip back and forth in their dances. Ocean's commentary is thus indicative of his attraction to both sexes. Ocean is also portrayed licking his cheek, an action that has been used within current popular culture to represent the act of giving oral sex to a male. This understanding paired with the overtly sexualized nature of the video's content allows viewers to presume the sexual intent of this included feature. Seconds later, Oceans lower voice cries, "this is heaven on earth" in relation to the sexual allure of a half-naked woman. Near the video's close, the abdomen of a fit black male is referred to as 'hot', while simultaneously being paired with a clip of a woman's glitter doused buttocks being slapped (Lebon). Ocean does not refrain from using explicit sexual content within the video to display the physical and emotional beauty of all relationships, regardless of sexual orientation.

## RACE

"Nikes" also works to outline issues of race and systemic discrimination of racial minorities within American culture. The definition of racism is, "racial prejudice when combined with social power" (Tatum 128). Racism, without a doubt, continues to hold presence within today's communities through calculated societal frameworks. There are several culturally ingrained structures of unequal power and authority, including police brutality, job discrimination, lack of

access to higher education, and heightened poverty, which have contributed to overarching negative race relations throughout the history of America (Bonilla-Silva). Ocean, being a black male, has likely felt the harsh effects of these injustices either directly or indirectly throughout the span of his life. Within “Nikes,” Ocean aims to depict the real-life application of these present issues to effectively highlight their great impacts.

Ocean uses video clips and accompanying lyrics within “Nikes” to effectively highlight and depict current race relations. In one particularly emotional scene, Ocean pays tribute to three of his late black colleagues and peers by singing “pour up for A\$AP, RIP Pimp C” (Ocean). Here he is referencing A\$AP Yams and Chad Butler, two American rappers who unfortunately lost their lives due to drug overdoses (Atieno). This line holds an underlying reference to the systemic pressures on young men of color, including increased poverty and lack of accessibility to higher education, which encourages them to use and sell drugs. Ocean then proceeds to sing, “RIP Trayvon, that n\*gga look just like me” (Ocean) Here, Ocean is referencing the murder of unarmed teenager Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman in 2012 (“Trayvon Martin Biography”). Trayvon and Ocean do, in fact, look similar, shining light on the notion that Trayvon’s murder has been the unfortunate truth for too many young black men in American, and could very well have been the fate of Ocean himself. This issue seems to deeply affect Ocean, as his lower voice insinuating masculinity and the suppression of femme emotions refrains from comment upon mention of Trayvon’s name (Lebon).

Later in the video, Ocean appears in a scene where, while wearing a black mask, he is set on fire by a contrasting white masked individual. When his character, still ablaze, falls to the ground and appears to be losing life, he is extinguished by the same white masked figure as

previously featured (Lebon). This scene is symbolic of the relationship that white impact has held on the lives of people of color by methods of systemic racism as observed throughout the history of the United States (Cole). The damaging prejudice and discrimination against people of color and the suppression of minority advancement will not be forgotten. Even if the white man eventually runs to the aid of the black man, black vitality will remain impaired. Another facet of this expression may aim to describe a system of cultural development through racism. In order for capitalism to serve the interests and advantages of one group, there must be the contrary presence of a disadvantaged community. Whereas Ocean was pushed to a breaking point, in the end, the fire was extinguished and he was kept alive, potentially due to the realization that his existence in society holds a distinct purpose. In this sense, Ocean's struggle is representative of the fate of people of color whose lives might not be taken, but are widely subdued to allow and propel the advancement of white privilege (Oluo).

#### CLASS

When describing class within "Nikes," Ocean aims to shine a contradictory light on accepted social constructs relating to the glorified and celebrated lives of rich and famous individuals. A social construction of reality is, "a mediated form of communication in which images and words supply us with information that shapes our perceptions of the world around us" (Kendall 6). When describing media framing of wealth, often, "journalists and television writers hold elites and their material possessions in greater awe—and encourage their audiences to do likewise." (Kendall 3). While Ocean is not arguing that the lives of the wealthy are more difficult than the lives of the poor, he is asserting that the excessively positive perceptions of affluence as facilitated by the media are not completely accurate. Whereas the media frequently



displays favorable representations of wealth, the rich and famous are not immune to the struggles of everyday people. Within “Nikes,” Ocean wants to present the public with a more realistic perspective on the trials of fame and fortune

Throughout the lyricism and footage displayed within “Nikes,” the theme of drug use is common. Ocean speaks vividly about his experiences surrounding drug use either overtly or presumably describing marijuana, acid, codeine, cocaine, alcohol, being high, and being involved in the drug trade (Ocean). Substance abuse is a prominent issue spanning throughout the entirety of the United States, and celebrities are an affected population. The pressures of being famous combined with the invitation to exclusive party scenes and the availability of highly potent and dangerous drugs prompt many celebrities to fall victim to substance abuse disorders (Elkins). To further expand on this description, within the video, there is a scene where a room full of people, likely abusing drugs within a party setting, are sprawled out on a dirty floor, either unconscious or refraining from movement (Lebon). This is an element that the media avoids in their framing of wealth as it would be difficult to glorify in public delivery. Ocean aims to make visible that these issues are widely prominent and are often a contributing factor in the unfortunately shortened lives of several famous artists (Ocean).

Another feature of the wealthy and famous lifestyle that serves as a recurring theme throughout the song is the distorted sense of relationships that individuals experience when they become celebrated within the public sphere. The very first line of the song, “these bitches want Nikes, they looking for a check” describes the ulterior motives that people sometimes adopt when trying to pursue a relationship with a famous individual. Rather than genuine interest, celebrities and people of excessive wealth have to be wary of common public interest in money, material

possessions, and social validation (Ocean). At one point in the song where a montage of party clips is being displayed, Ocean's lower voice states "don't take no photos in the party, that's rule number one" (Lebon). This quote serves as an assertion of how friendships can seem artificial when the public feels the need to document and post the fact that they are in your presence. Ocean also describes within the song the notion that "homies" have undertaken "demons 'tryna body jump" a lyric symbolic of the personality shift that can occur in people that were once close when the nature of their relationships become artificial (Lebon). Ocean is therefore unable to trust both the people that he meets, as well as the people that he knew before his fame took off.

#### INTERSECTIONALITY

As stated previously, Ocean applies a lens of intersectionality to describe the issues listed above in efforts to more accurately portray his lived experiences to the public. Intersectionality is "a reconceptualization of identity that has been expanded to include a variety of marginalized identities. Thus, socially constructed dimensions of identity, including, but not limited to, gender, race, class, sexuality, and nationality, are understood as interconnected components that make up individuals" (Kosut 177-178) Within "Nikes," issues of gender, sexuality and race are presented as overlapping characteristics of a collective identity in efforts to protect the individualized lived experience that Ocean is trying to convey. In terms of Ocean's discussion of wealth, the trials of a wealthy lifestyle cannot be marginalized, and therefore are not a component to be included in an intersectional depiction of race, class, sexuality, and gender issues. With that being said, Ocean still aims to offer a new perspective in opposition to the general celebration of wealthy lifestyles, that of which we should include in our outlook surrounding the intertwined messages portrayed within his video.

Within the film, there were instances where viewers could identify issues through intersectional approaches as applied by Ocean. Some prominent examples include pressures and availability of drugs surrounding famous black individuals, non-gender conformity and its effects on class status, masculinity and femininity when dealing with the systemic abuse of marginalized races, Ocean's own experience of discrimination in being black and bisexual, and wealth and fame contributing to the ability for Ocean to share his story in the first place. Ocean understands that the experience of cultural minorities in any fashion is difficult, individualized, and valid, and he aims to be inclusive and supportive of all people regardless of the factors that contribute to their identity. This perception is visible throughout the duration of Ocean's music video.

## CONCLUSION

Although Ocean lives outside of the public spotlight and refrains from the use of excessive social media and concert tours to bestow his personal identity upon the public, listeners can gain ample raw insight to the path of Ocean's experience through his music. Ocean is a bisexual black man who often does not conform to gender stereotypes. He is blessed with a life of fame and fortune but often does not utilize it in the same fashion that other A list celebrities do. Ocean has been firm in his assertion of living a moderately private life and instead shares his free and unprejudiced understanding of people and society through his music, even if it stands contrary to what society may perceive as 'normal'. In this sense, Ocean is a unique artist and proceeds to lack binding to any sort of cultural conformity surrounding the discrimination of disadvantaged groups. This feature is present and identifiable within the "Nikes" song and accompanying video.

"Nikes" as a whole undertakes several different ideals relating to issues of sexuality, gender, race and class. Ocean debunks hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity through a

portrayal of non-gender conformity and the exposure to marginalized sexualities, he brings attention to harmful systemic racism present within American culture, and he shares his individualized experience of possessing excessive fame and fortune that works to challenge social constructionism regarding wealth. Ocean further applies these matters to his story in an inclusive and intersectional fashion. These features of the song and music video promote inclusivity and are a prominent factor contributing to why Ocean has been so widely renowned and publicly acclaimed. Many artists today write music without an abundance of deeper meaning - this is one aspect of Ocean's being that sets him far apart and high above several of his colleagues. "Nikes" is a work of art, and it will go down in history as music with real, lasting social and cultural meaning.

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# Street Art: A Crime or a Movement in Time?

by Taylor Chieffalo

Graffiti culture is one of the most popular and common forms of art in contemporary art culture, however, it is one of the most underrated and stigmatized. Street art is found all over the world, some more appealing than others, but all with a given voice. Artists use common space as a method of expressing and portraying their message to a specific society. Typically, artwork is found in museums, galleries, or showings, and is structured for a particular audience. Street art, however, is unique because there is no intended audience. It is designed in the public eye for anyone who crosses paths with it to enjoy. This research essay is going to address the dynamic of street culture on a global scale, viewing its origin, its breach to social movements, and its position in society to ultimately define what it means to be authentic in street culture. The overarching question to adhere to throughout this essay is: How does the stigmatization of graffiti and street art culture negatively impact its authenticity and freedom of expression?

The stigmatization of street art stems from the lack of understanding and the preconceived notion that all graffiti is vandalism and illegal. Before claiming that street *is* an illegal act of vandalism, we must understand what these two terms mean and how they co-exist amongst each other. According to the Oxford Dictionary, vandalism is an “action involving deliberate destruction of or damage to public or private property”. The term addresses property damage, as the use of graffiti as the defacement of any property without permission of the owner. However, there are questions and concerns that require further explanation on this dictionary definition of vandalism. Who gets to decide what counts as vandalism? Can what one

person perceive as vandalism be viewed as beautification for another? Is all vandalism illegal? The reality is, a large percentage of street art is considered illegal and act as a defacement of private property because it is placed amongst buildings and street walls that they do not own. In contrary, the answers to these questions are subjective, and cannot be universally defined in all terms of street art. This essay will address the different dimensions of street art, beginning with the simplest forms of graffiti, moving to the extravagant street art that infiltrates the world of consumerism. Many artists use public space as an outlet to share political and social issues, and spark social movements. To further support the argument that street art has triggered a social movement, this essay will provide a brief case study on Banksy, an anonymous social graffiti artist. Analyzing several empirical sources, this essay will dive into Banksy's historical background as a social street artist to validate the implications public space and consumerism has embedded on modern-day street art culture.

Street art is found all over the world, ranging from scribbles and 'tags' found on urban train cars and bus stations, to highly skilled and aesthetically pleasing artistic work. Artists use public space as a canvas to express themselves and portray social and political opinions to society. According to the Oxford Dictionary, public space is defined as "a place that is generally open and accessible to the people. Roads, public squares, parks and beaches are considered public space". The use of public space as a canvas within street art can be considered unconventional when comparing it to the origin of traditional art. Traditional art pieces are typically found in museums, galleries, and showings, displayed to an audience who often had to purchase a ticket to see it. The artwork in such places is positioned to be viewed in a structured manner, with art displayed on canvases, glass vases, or large empty rooms. The viewers go to museums or galleries with an



expectation and an intent to see something 'special'. Street art is unique to traditional art because the intended audience is public. The audience is anyone who inhabits or passes through the space. The intent of the artist is to create a piece that draws the attention of the public without interrupting the routine of their everyday life.

Using several secondary sources, this paper will begin by addressing the origin of street art, and how the early influences of childhood molded urban street artists into the way they are today. Looking at the earliest forms of street art, the research conducted will address how the public perception of this art form has continuously gained critique due to its negative stereotype stemming from its origin as a popular culture beginning in the late 70's (Maric, 2014). Most cities deem it illegal for graffiti artists to deface private property, however graffiti artists argue that they are using freedom of expression to share their beliefs with an unsolicited audience. By digging deeper into graffiti history and its relevance on a global scale, I am going to look at its origin of authenticity, a concept defined as "an essential attempt to live one's life according to the needs of inner being" (Merrill, 2015). My argument throughout this essay is not whether or not graffiti should or should not be legal, but rather to analyze the stigmatization of graffiti artwork, and how the use of public space and consumerism affects the authentic nature of street culture.

### **Early Influences of Street Culture**

Authenticity, according to the Oxford Dictionary, is "the representation of one's true nature or beliefs; the act of being true to oneself or to the person identified". The early forms of street art derive from the origin of street and hip-hop culture. The recognition of hip-hop culture as a culture began in the early 1980's, as a large cultural movement for many African Americans in varying urban cities, primarily known for its significance in New York and Philadelphia. Hip-hop

culture was more than just rap music, break dancing, and street art. It was the beginning of social justice for the African American community. Throughout history, the African American culture has been suppressed and constructed to mold into a society that was developed for them. However, the rise of Hip-Hop culture enabled African Americans to develop a cultural identity that was authentic to their lifestyle. The spread of hip-hop culture expanded rapidly among urban cities all over the world, and its shift into mainstream media redefined what it meant to be from the streets leaving some with the feeling that it has begun to lose its “authentic nature”. Reginald Bradley addresses in his article, *Manicured Street Dream and Dreamers*, how mainstream media has altered the definition of what it means to be from the streets. He claimed that as the hip-hop culture immersed the mainstream market, the origins of street culture has been overshadowed by consumerism and the potential to make a profit. “The consumer audience that engages in street culture, primarily music, have not a clue what it means to be from the streets” (Bradley, 2010). Society’s interpretation of what it means to live on the streets is subjected to trend and the demand of consumers, many focusing on the past representation and defining it as the reality of stereotypes and biases. Initially, the street was a designated space of struggle and survival, often correlated with high crime rates and drug affiliation, but was a true marker to one’s authenticity and reality. Bradley stated that “to truthfully be from the streets is not an option, it is a reality. Nowadays, being from the streets can be viewed as a business opportunity” (Bradley, 2010).

The original purpose of hip-hop culture was for people to express themselves, whether its intention was to mark their territory, or give a voice to the public about social and political problems that were arising in society. Brown, when writing about U.S hip-hop culture emerging in German culture, writes, “There is the more explicitly political brand of hip hop that combines a

political critique of existing social conditions with a celebration of a transplanted version of hip hop as a means of cultural resistance” (Brown, 2006). Graffiti played as a silent form of public speech, and has been seen to be a highly effective protest against societal norms. *Style Wars*, a documentary created in 1983, highlights the rise of street pop culture in the early 80s in Brooklyn. The documentary follows a couple of young street artists around their neighborhoods in Brooklyn, enabling the viewers to see these young men in a realistic light, focusing on their upbringing, their motivation behind street art, and what they aspire to get from it. The documentary allows viewers to understand street culture from an inside perspective, encouraging audiences to indulge in the imagination of each artist’s mind. Kase 2, a street artist followed in the film, displayed the mentality that addresses the individual passion of producing street art regardless of its legal implications. Stating, “People look at a person, what you write on trains? Oh, you vandalism and all that. Yeah, I vandalism alright, but still in general I know what I’m doin’. I did somethin’ to make yo eyes open up. Right? So why you still talking bout it for?” (*Style Wars*, 1983). *Style Wars* highlights the stigmatization and criminalization of graffiti, and how legal issues have caused chaos among the street community. The controversy over street graffiti in New York, however, is that most artists spray paint in unwarranted areas and their acts are illegal, therefore the street art culture has become stigmatized with crime and misconduct.

Skeme, a 15-year-old graffiti artist who inhibited a similar passion as Kase 2, was notorious for getting in trouble with his mother when engaging in graffiti related events. She completely disapproved of his involvement with the graffiti culture, claiming that it provides nothing but trouble. J. Synder’s article, *Crime, Media, and Culture*, addresses the subculture of graffiti as a criminal act and poses the controversial line between what is self-expression and what is a felony.

“What you got is a whole miserable subculture” (Style Wars, 1983). As one of the younger members of the group, Skeme idolized older Brooklyn graffiti artists. He wasn’t a bad kid, but he had no intention of quitting this culture because he felt like it gave him the freedom to express himself, while being a part of something larger. Following labeling theory’s model of secondary deviance, the affixing of a criminal label may further entrench those labeled in a life of criminality. However, rather than simply embarking on a self-fulfilling ‘life of crime’, some graffiti writers chose legitimate means to counter their negative publicity. (Snyder, 2006).

In *Style Wars*, the documentary coins terms common in graffiti lingo such as “tagging and bombing” and defines them in context of action. Pat Rafferty writes about the influence street art and graffiti have on youth culture in his article, *The Street Art/Graffiti of Youth*, accompanying those terms with a formal definition, defining them as a “tagline” or “identity” to each artist. In the world of graffiti an artist uses tags, a symbol or series of letters that represents a particular artist, to credit themselves on the streets. In the graffiti culture, most artists have a tag because it is their way of showing their presence and anonymously crediting themselves for their work. As seen through *Style Wars*, not all graffiti is glamorous and extensive. A lot of graffiti, especially the earliest forms in urban cities, is strictly tagging on subways and train cars, for artists to show that they were there and they are present. Tagging highlights the importance of graffiti as an act of freedom of speech and a way for one to express their ideas unconventionally. In contrast to traditional art, graffiti doesn’t have to be aesthetically pleasing for it to be “art”. This draws in on the controversial debate pertaining to what the difference is between ‘trash/ tagging graffiti’ and ‘political and social art’. Is there a difference or are they both an individual voice of authenticity?

## **Authenticity as a Graffiti Artist**

To truly understand why graffiti has become such a phenomenon we have to understand the logistics of what graffiti means to the people who actually participate in it. When understanding the subculture of graffiti, it is important to view it from differing perspectives. Graffiti and street art are placed into a broader category of 'art', however, still are separated from what the general public considers traditional art. Traditionally, most people pay to go to galleries or museums to see a recognized artist and they go in with the intention of knowing what they are going to see. However, street art is not restricting within museum walls or galleries. Street art is displayed where people live and roam and openly engage in their everyday lives. Chances are, an individual comes in contact with a significant amount of artwork on the street daily that they do not even notice is there. Merrill, writes in *Keeping it real? Subcultural graffiti, street art, heritage and authenticity*, that the subculture of graffiti and street art is framed as heritage. In terms of heritage, "an expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation" (Merill, 2015). Merrill talks about how graffiti "heritage" is problematic due to street art stereotypes correlated with traditions of illegality and anti-commercialism. He argues that claiming graffiti culture as a heritage undermines the authenticity of street art, and validates the stereotypical assumptions attached to it. He defends this claim by articulating the historical perspective of graffiti, and claims defining it as heritage overshadows that. Viewing the complications with graffiti through the eye of society, we are exposed to how the street art subculture has created realities that go against the law. Merrill states that the subculture of graffiti is creation of a heritage, but there are implications to keep it from staying authentic.

To defend Merrill's theory of graffiti culture as an illegal heritage, *The Graffiti Subculture*, by Nancy Macdonald, discusses the authentic nature of graffiti through the lens of illegality. She claims that within the graffiti subculture, graffiti artists feel legitimized by the hard work and effort they put into the creation of each piece of art. "The illegal subculture of graffiti exhibits a symbiotic relationship with the world that they are resisting and rebelling" (Macdonald, 2001). Macdonald argues that graffiti cultures are authentic, but through the role of illegality. Meaning, by conforming to illegal conventions, graffiti artists are promised a powerful degree of legitimacy (Macdonald, 2001), even if it is legitimized by disobeying the law. To validate her argument that illegality roots the authentic nature of graffiti, she compares the dynamic of graffiti culture similarly to one's seen in club cultures. She states that club cultures thrive off the aspect of being 'underground', and they feel legitimated through their separation from the rest of the world. They do not want to be part of the "mass" or the "mainstream," but instead feel rewarded with a sense of credibility in their differences. This is similar to graffiti subculture in the sense where they feel legitimized by doing 'underground' or 'illegal' work. Though comparable, Macdonald says the major differences between both subcultures is that the club scene is reliant on the commercial world, and the graffiti subculture is not. Though viewed as a 'criminal' activity, graffiti artists still passionate to keep the culture 'pure'. "By encouraging illegality, the prize of authenticity helps it in this struggle" (Macdonald, 2001). Drawing in Macdonald's theory about illegality inhibiting graffiti authenticity, Merrill's concern about coining graffiti as a heritage is better illustrated. "The potential to integrate subcultural graffiti within international heritage frameworks as prospective tangible but also intangible heritage is considered, along with the possible problems this might imply for authenticity of its subculture traditions" (Merrill, 2015). He

is not arguing that graffiti culture is not deserving to be titled as a heritage, instead he is arguing that its history and perception of illegality will hinder its subculture's traditions.

The stigmatization of graffiti and street culture stems from the origins of where graffiti is typically found. Street culture is prominent in large urban cities, which has been socially constructed to correlate with violence, poverty, and crime. The perception of graffiti is commonly correlated with the perception of the particular community as a whole.

In *Distinction & the aristocracy of culture*, one of Bourdieu's main claims is that culture and knowledge directly correlate with the resources and advantages one is given throughout their lifetime. Bourdieu reiterates that culture is subjective to the individual and their past experiences and exposures. Culture comes from what you grew up into, and the differences of individuals result in automatic rankings among their peers. This is extremely prevalent in the form of street identity and how one views their culture, thus views their actions. As street art is stigmatized as an unlawful act, Bourdieu would claim that the stereotypes are contingent less on the act of street art itself, but its geographical location. In urban cities there is wealth and there is poverty. The street culture is illustrated to be a negative component to society because where a lot of street art is found is in the less financially stable areas. Bourdieu's article further analyzes the stigmatization of graffiti artists, primarily in urban cities. Graffiti art is financially very low budget, especially simplistic graffiti; subway carts, public walls, posters. Due to this, many artists are coined to be financially unstable, uneducated, and felons. Bourdieu's concept of cultural knowledge deriving from experiences is extremely relevant in graffiti subculture since many street artists work with friends or family who share that similar interest. "A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it

is encoded” (Bourdieu, 1998). As a modern society, we feel we are able to depict a sense of who someone is without truly understanding that person with little to no knowledge about the culture but that is not the case. “A beholder who lacks the specific code feels lost in a chaos of sounds and rhythms, colours and lines, without rhyme or reason” (Bourdieu, 1998). This creates divides due to societal standings among cultures and works as a barrier between one another.

### **Street Art vs. Traditional**

Graffiti is a contemporary art form that has moved beyond traditional artwork by recognized artists that are typically seen in museums or galleries. “Graffiti art is neither ‘simply graffiti’ nor ‘simply art’, but a new kind of visual cultural production that exceeds both categories” (Austin, 2010). It is no longer paintings on canvases that mimic what a city looks like, it has become art that is physically placed on the city itself. In *More to see than a canvas in a white cube*, J. Austin argues that street art acts as a method of ‘taking place’ in public society. Graffiti and street art implement a contemporary way of urban living and disrupts the socially constructed perceptions of traditional society. Public art, the more aesthetically pleasing form of art, is related to consumerism and often regarded as a tool that can help enhance the distinctiveness and attractiveness of cities. “There is no doubt that the current process of globalization and increasing competitiveness of cities greatly influence the relation between public art and urban development” (Austin, 2010). When immersing public art into developing urban areas, public art can be used as a tool to “beautify” and “enhance” the economic base of the location.

Austin compares and contrasts traditional art to modern street art, and analyzes how the use of public space emphasizes the message the artist plans to portray. He claims that street art is



the opening up of endless possibility for anyone to be taken seriously. We do not have to recognize an artist, or pay to enter a museum, to appreciate the meaning of art. Traditional art is typically used for consumerism and profit. “Built around familiar imagery of product advertisements, celebrity cults and everyday consumption practices, consumerist art is inherently rooted in the present social context, mirroring the dominant cultural values and making comments on the world we live in” (Martinique, 2016). However, street art is almost free to produce and free to experience. Many morals of street artists work is that it is more about their message to the public than it is about recognition. “The force that motivates many graffiti artists is, in fact, identical to that of many so-called “legitimate” artists. The major difference? The “legitimate” artists have found—or were given by status, privilege, or luck—a way to fit their work into the economic system” (Maddox, 2016).

## **Banksy**

An anonymous England-based graffiti artist named Banksy is a major contributor in adapting his political graffiti into public spaces. Banksy is significant to the street art culture due to his ability to take on social issues that he wants to address the general public with, and portray them through his pieces. Banksy began his work in the early 1990’s as a graffiti artist, displaying small messages here and there throughout European cities that he has visited. Quickly, his art evolved, stenciling recognizable images that identify him as *the* Banksy, similarly to a tag in the graffiti world. Banksy was a significant as a social activist because most of his pieces were in retaliation of modern society. One image that he uses frequently is a stencil of a small rat. He stated, “I began to spray some small rats in the streets of Paris because rats are the only wild animals living in cities, and only rats will survive when the human race disappears and dies out,”

continuing, "If you feel dirty, insignificant, or unloved, then rats are a good role model. They exist without permission, they have no respect for the hierarchy of society, and they have sex 50 times a day." – Banksy" (TheArtStory, 2001). Banksy stated that he liked to spray rats in urban cities because they represent wrongdoing in society, and the rats acted as a metaphor to the illegality of street art. However, going beyond the representation of street art, they represent misfits of society. They represent the disruption of societal norms.

Banksy, like many other street artists, justified his "vandalism" in public space by defending his use of art as a public form of speech. With his artwork, he responded to "brandalism," which is the concept of large corporations using public space to promote their company and or business for profit reasons.

He states:

*"The people who run our cities don't understand graffiti because they think nothing has the right to exist unless it makes a profit...the people who truly deface our neighborhoods are the companies that scrawl giant slogans across buildings and buses trying to make us feel inadequate unless we buy their stuff....any advertisement in public space that gives you no choice whether you see it or not is yours, it belongs to you, it's yours to take, rearrange and re use. Asking for permission is like asking to keep a rock someone just threw at your head..." – (Banksy, 2000).*

Though Banksy isn't particularly putting up his messages to make a profit, his unique voice and extremist nature to retaliate society has attracted a popular fan base and has enabled him to fall into the category of consumerism. His work is so admired that he has become a branded name and thus, with a brand comes consumers and profitability. On October 5<sup>th</sup>, Banksy put up one of his pieces in the Smithsonian auction, and it got auctioned off to sell for \$1.4 million. When

the piece “Girl with Balloon” was sold, it began to descend from its picture frame and as it lowered, the picture was simultaneously being shredded. This action created large discussion around the art world, questioning what his true intent was by displaying this message. Many people believed that the self-destructing art piece was a method to retaliate capitalism and consumerism within the art market. However, critics believe that it was a self-promoting publicity stunt. Due to the anonymous nature of Banksy, no one will truly know what his true intentions were. However, due to his reputation structured on social justice and political speech, it can be suggested that it was a way to mock the culture of commercialism, and prove that his authentic nature as an anonymous artist is pure, regardless of his recognition.

### **Consumerism in Street Art**

The contrast between commercialism and street culture has been a continuous topic for discussion as the recognition of renowned street artists have begun to emerge. “People had to somehow be original and interpret an aspect of themselves. To be original, you have to draw from your own background, your own culture, your own personality, what you’ve lived through” (Milillio, 2016). Street culture thrives off the use of public space to address issues and or topics that one wants to bring to a mass audience, but when tying in commercialism and consumerism, how have these concepts driven many artists away from their authentic expression? “The rise of consumer culture and its role in the production of new desires and subjectivities has been seen by many as destructive of traditional cultures” (Moore and Held, 2008). This quote from Moore and Held directly depicts the argument that consumer culture has played a role in deterring authenticity in street art culture. In *Cultural Politics in a Global Age*, Moore and Held are addressing consumer culture in the forms of digital media, and how that has affected the customs

of traditional culture. This essay, however, is not focusing on the implications of social media, but it is focusing on how consumerism has affected the integrity that street artists encompass.

Graffiti in public spaces is a controversial topic, not only because it competes with consumerism, but with the citizens living in such areas. Many people think of these spaces not as public, but as private property. The appropriation of privately owned spaces (like building exteriors) for public art violates norms of private ownership. In *Understanding Public Space Regulation in the Tourist City*, Lucas Pizzolatto, professor at Lund University, conducted a research analysis to in depth address the implications of art in public space in regards to tourist destinations. Many people are not comfortable with artists using public space as a place for them to express their artwork. In his research, Pizzolatto addresses the “legally regulated” areas in urban cities versus the “illegally regulated” areas, and how the perception of public art changes in regards to which area it is in. Through his research, Pizzolatto found that in urban cities, most cities are not separated from what is legally considered public space to what is illegally considered public. However, many people and tourists believe that it is separated, which makes an area either more desired to attend, or viewed as a ‘bad area’. “Accordingly, individuals change their perceptions about what is proper behavior in a particular place. This may also be due to the fact that the content of legal norms does not always coincide with that of social norms” (Pizzolatto, 2013). Due to the involuntary exposure, a percentage of the public feel as though they have the right to regulate where it’s positioned. When artwork is placed into public spaces, it can often cause the price of living in those communities to go up (Pizzolatto, 2013). When a location becomes a tourist destination, the price of living increases in order to maintain a constant balance

between consumerism and profit and artwork can transform a location to a more idealistic destination for tourists to visit.

### **Street Art's Global Community**

In recent years, street art has embodied popular culture and has grown in many art markets. Street artists have entered galleries, museums, and many have been given opportunities to work in large scale public art projects. The expression of street art, especially with help from the media, has provided artist to be exposed to a large global audience. Bengsten investigates street art as a newly established contemporary art in his article, *The street art world. Almendros de Granada Press* (2014). By conducting a primary case study entailing interactions with artists, gallerists, and bloggers, Bengsten gains firsthand experience in the social movement. Bengsten's research is done on a global scale and incorporates street artists from all over the world, providing data from various street cultures. His insight on artists around the world provides specific data about how the culture of graffiti functions as a global community. Throughout media street artists are exposed to other works of art that either spark their interest, or inspire them to collaboratively work alongside of. "New technologies, give artists and other cultural producers new ways of turning creative visions into marketable products." (Moore and Held, 2008). Hall coined the concept of "imagined communities" (1996), which was created by Benedict Anderson. In short, Hall defines an imagined community by how a culture is socially constructed or "imagined" by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group, essentially, how a group represents or identifies themselves. Within their culture, they view themselves as the same and want the same goal. In terms of global street culture, it does not matter where an artist is from, whether it's France or New York City, street art is depicted as an "imagined community". The

media enables street artists to work and connect with each other, even from afar. Seen as unlawful, messy, and unwanted, street art enables outside perspectives to commonly judge through the stereotypical nature of the culture. Defining the street perception as an imagined community, we understand that regardless of perception, street artists view themselves as social activists, as an authentic artist, and as a culture.

## **Conclusion**

By combining scholarly and empirical research to define what it means to be “authentic” in graffiti and street culture, this essay provided insight to the role the social implications and stigmatizations built upon this culture have been adapted throughout society. The rise of street art culture is more than just an art form, it is a social movement dating back to its origin in the late 70’s. Street culture, however, will always struggle with breaking down barriers that restrict it from being a fully acceptable method of art. Though it has become more accepted as a form of contemporary art, street art will also be molded by its heritage and compare to the traditional sense of art.

The social and cultural stigmatizations, the legality issue, and the definition of pure authenticity will continuously be discussed within the street culture and society. Though street art stems away from the traditional forms of art that we are predisposed to believe as “true art,” it is understood that its lack of acknowledgement does not make it any less authentic. Street culture is the most modern form of culture, for it is unrestricted, it is not institutionalized, and it is a method of freedom of expression. This research essay was able to address the dynamic of street culture on a global scale, viewing its origin, its breach to social movements, and its position in society, to ultimately define what it means to be authentic in street culture.

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# Sorry (Not Sorry): Who Carries the Weight of Digital Public Shaming?

by Eva Ford



This year, articles titled, “Laura Lee slammed for ‘fake’ apology after racist tweets,” “#LauraLeeisCancelled: A Masterclass on How NOT to Film an Apology Video,” and “YouTuber Laura Lee Apologizes for Her Apology Video,” flooded the internet after this beauty guru uploaded a four-minute apology video for her racist tweets. Whether you recognize Laura Lee’s name or not, it’s more likely you recognize one of these popular memes created from her video. Unfortunately for Lee, her video was not well-received and, for this reason, she is more recently recognized as the YouTuber who missed the mark, i.e. failed at apologizing.



Lee is certainly not the first YouTube celebrity to feel the need to produce an apology video, indeed her video arrives nearly six months after Logan Paul's, though she *may* be the most criticized. She has since deleted this first apology video and uploaded two more. The negative attention her attempts received is partly why her apology video is brought up as often as an apology video by Logan Paul, the tenth highest paid person on YouTube in 2018 with nearly five times more subscribers than Lee (O'Kane). Logan Paul's controversy is different from Lee's in that he is not being called out for actions



from the past but instead in present time for an extremely controversial video he made while visiting Japan. In the original video, now deleted from YouTube, Paul recorded himself in front of a person who hung themselves, taken in a forest in Japan known as a destination to commit suicide.<sup>1</sup> Given his celebrity status and more than 18 million YouTube subscribers, it didn't take long for his video to spread like wildfire throughout the internet as people all over the world were offended by his perceived insensitivity regarding the person whose dead body was captured in his video, seen as yet another one of Paul's props for comedic affect.

Logan Paul and Laura Lee are just two of the more well-known YouTube stars who made apology videos recently. There are more – *plenty* more. To some extent, they can be rather formulaic and expected. Some are more successful than others. Some make the problem worse.

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<sup>1</sup> Mount Fuji's Aokigahara Jukai forest, colloquially known as "suicide forest"

Many, like Lee, are criticized for not being genuine. But what is a genuine apology in the world of YouTubers and other social media influencers? Are they necessary? What purpose do they serve? What can we say for sure is that public apology videos have emerged along with, and as a response to, forms of digital public shaming – the mass reactions by viewers, followers, and the public at large to people’s publicly posted and recorded behaviors that are deemed shame-worthy. Public apology videos have surfaced as a response to the digital public shaming now rampant in response to people’s behaviors that are deemed shame-worthy by the public. It doesn’t take much to become the person on the receiving end of the wrath of internet shaming, and the spread occurs at seemingly exponential rates. People do stupid things all the time, things they will later regret, and surely some deserve to be checked for their behavior, but do the punishments *always* fit the crimes? The mob mentality that often comes to fruition within online platforms punishes people through the trial of public opinion. This can have dire consequences for the person being shamed. Being on the receiving end of digital collective outrage can lead to death threats, career loss, and long-term damage to a person’s identity or reputation.

### **Public Shaming Throughout the Years**

Public shaming on social media may feel new, but public demonstrations of outrage or punishment, meant to cause shame and damage to a person’s reputation, are not new. Nathaniel Hawthorne's famous historical fiction novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, offers a window into 17th and 18th century shaming sentences in colonial America. The story's main character, Hester Prynne,

provides insight regarding how such shaming sentences impacted people's lives. After serving time in jail for her sin of adultery, Hester was forced to don a scarlet colored "A." Forced to stand on display for everyone in the village to see, she must embroider the "A" onto her attire for the rest of her life. In the "Shaming and the Digital Scarlet Letter" chapter of his 2007 book, *The*



*future of reputation: Gossip, rumor, and privacy on the Internet*, author Daniel Solove explains how the symbol serves as an "inescapable reminder of her past misdeeds," meaning her breaching of community norms (91).

The theocratic system of government in place during this time viewed one's social status as their most valuable asset (Ziel 500). Given the size, the interdependent functioning of communities, and the citizens' life-long residency in their communities, a person's public reputation, or how they were viewed and received by the rest of the community, was of utmost importance (500). This communal type of society has been characterized by German sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies' (1955) concept of a "Gemeinschaft," or close-knit traditional community. Connections within a Gemeinschaft were formed through kinship, blood relation, mutual interdependence, and multi-dimensional associations (cited in Miller 2011).

With such interdependence, and lacking modern methods of surveillance, record keeping, and criminal justice, maintaining strong relationships with the whole community is essential to both the individual and the community. As such, falling out of line with the common moral standards and rules of one's community is discouraged—public shaming punishments are used as the ultimate deterrence. Punishments included, for example, people being put in pillories or



publicly confessing to, or wearing symbols for, their wrongdoings, in front of as many townspeople as possible (Ziel 500). Writing about Hester Prynne, Hawthorne gives a sense of the influence of these sentences, describing how the letter "had the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and enclosing her in a sphere by herself" (47). A scarlet letter was effective in the 17<sup>th</sup> century because people could not escape the

sting of their shame. Everyone knew everyone, towns were small, and one likely did not and could not simply move to the next town over.

Such tactics fell by the wayside once individual liberty replaced social status as the society's highest value, according to the new political ideology in 1776 (Ziel 501). Additionally, the urbanization of the country following the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century meant many people were no longer living in such tight-knit, everybody-knows-everybody, communities. Mutual interdependence became less essential for survival and individual prosperity. This new social arrangement, born out of the urbanizing Industrial world, was termed the "Gesellschaft" by Tonnies (1995). In contrast to the close-knit community of the Gemeinschaft, Tonnies' (1995) Gesellschaft refers to an associational society, as in, a group of people who are merely associated

with one another, not dependent on one another (Miller 185). Since people were less dependent on their fellow community members to function, social action became more individualized, with relationships "based on things like choice, formal contracts and convenience" (185). Without relying on each of one's neighbors for the goods and services necessary to function, people in a *Gesellschaft* can reasonably be less concerned with the opinions of all the people in one's community. Even if your neighbors think you breach all community norms, chances are good their opinions won't disrupt all facets of your life. In a *Gemeinschaft*, where transactions are based primarily on trust and reputation, a loss of reputation among community members could mean the inability to work, receive help, or experience freedom of movement without scorn. In a *Gesellschaft*, where transactions are based primarily on financial currency and contractual obligations, few may care about misdeeds or bad behavior as long as you have money or wealth, or, few may even know given the greater anonymity and larger scale of society. You might not be invited to your neighbor's end-of-summer barbeque, but you may very well still be able to go into work or see a doctor without that reputation following you and tainting those experiences.

As communities became larger, more transient, and more anonymous than they were during colonial times, it was less effective to punish someone with, say, a scarlet letter, as there is a lesser social sting when living amongst strangers in a city, or in a suburb where neighbors can move in or out with relative ease. However, even if shaming isn't used as a formal punishment, we still experience shaming on a societal level in different ways. For example, police records are public and often reported in local newspapers so, if you commit a crime, everyone in that town or city has the ability know about it. More specifically, if a person commits a sex crime, they must register as a sex offender and must notify neighbors and employers of their crimes. One could

imagine the ensuing consequences, such as loss of employment or struggle to gain employment, trouble with housing, tarnished reputation, etc. For this reason, shaming is not really *gone*, per say, but rather it seems to be less of a public spectacle. While a registered sex offender may suffer greatly from the consequences of their actions, not every person with whom they come into contact has to know about their misdeed, as was the case for Hester Prynne. A sex offender has to alert *certain* people but the registration of their crimes is not equal to Hester Prynne's literal scarlet letter—and its associated meaning—plastered on her clothing for every person in town to see. Additionally, people can move away if the shaming punishment is too harsh. The concept of a 'fresh start' is now always a possibility. If your neighbors' disapproval of you becomes too much, you can always move away.

The ability to easily 'start over,' taken for granted by most in modern society, may be slipping away – especially for young people and those who are heavy users of social media, who are so accustomed to constant public displays and communication that keep them ever-connected to others. While we haven't returned to harsh shaming punishments like in the colonial times *completely*, we have certainly brought back the possibility of making that shaming feel as effective and severe. Not to mention, we've also brought back the ability to punish a person for behaviors that aren't necessarily illegal (e.g. writing racist tweets or cheating on one's romantic partner) with the kind of wrath used in colonial times. Even if you are not in any legal trouble, you can face dire consequences from the rest of society, who has easier access to something deemed shameful about you because of the internet and social media—where information is often public, easily accessible, archived, and rapidly shareable. It seems we live in the age of never-forgetting.

For example, Jeffree Star, a famous beauty expert on YouTube, may have thought saying something vile to someone years ago would never come back to haunt him but with the video recording capabilities of today and the permanence of the internet, his past behaviors can follow him forever, and that they did. While he doesn't have to wear a scarlet "A," people other than those who may be in direct contact with him have the access to know about the backlash he's enduring. Meaning, a potential sponsor will easily know but so too could any given person on the street, perhaps the next barista serving him at Starbucks. It's as if we're living in a Neo-Gemeinschaft, the internet has enabled shaming to become a public, community-like spectacle again. In the words of media scholar Marshall McLuhan, we're now living in the "global village."



The internet has been able to give people a place to voice their opinions. In terms of shaming, this can result in people being called out for inappropriate behavior, poor customer service and the like. While many of the behaviors that were punishable by shaming sentences in colonial times are no longer considered punishable by law, like adultery (in most states), the internet has proven to be a perfect place to restore trials of public opinion and vigilante justice. Justine Sacco's story is a perfect example of this. In 2013, Sacco tweeted, "Going to Africa. Hope I don't get AIDS. Just kidding. I'm white!" to her 170 Twitter followers before boarding a plane to South Africa. By the time she got off





the eleven-hour flight, her whole world had been turned upside down. She had become the number one trending topic on Twitter as people all over the world were rooting for her to get fired. Not long after, she was indeed let go from her PR position as the senior director of corporate communications at IAC. Like Hester Prynne was shamed by the entire community through a trial of public opinion, Justine Sacco's reputation was damaged in a severe way. Although she has no physical scarlet letter attached to her clothing, she does have a long list of negative statements following her around online, just Google her. Internet shaming, Daniel Solove (2007) explains, "creates a permanent record of a person's transgressions. And it is done by amateur self-appointed investigative reporters, often without affording the target a chance at self-defense. Numerous others then join in to help shame the victim, creating the cyberspace equivalent to mob justice" (78). Jon Ronson, author of the 2015 *New York Times* article<sup>2</sup> "How one stupid tweet blew up Justine Sacco's life," discusses the lives of people such as Sacco who have been publicly shamed as a result of content they posted on social media. Ronson dives into the aftermath of the digital public shaming Sacco and others endure, writing, "the people I met were mostly unemployed, fired for their transgressions, and they seemed broken somehow — deeply confused and traumatized." While shaming can give people a chance to fight back and attempt to improve social control and order, Solove ultimately concludes that online shaming becomes uncivil, moblike, and subversive of the very social order it is trying to protect, writing that, it "often careens out of control" and "targets people without careful consideration of all the facts and punishes them for their supposed infractions without proportionality" (102). In order to

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from his 2016 book, *So You've Been Publicly Shamed*.

understand how online shaming becomes so effective, it's helpful to understand the technological innovations that enable it to occur.

### **How It Can Occur**

Prior to the internet, people could physically remove themselves from a problematic situation or unfortunate reputation. Ronson describes the perception of the power of shaming punishments to have deteriorated in the modern age. No longer could shame keep such a grip on an individual because one could easily avoid the attention. Or so we thought. Now, people leave a digital trail of their lives, including, for example, one's location, relationship statuses, contact lists, opinions, and group associations. The ability to supposedly start fresh has become less feasible. Our pasts are blending with our presents. This can be attributed to how much information is collected about us. Paper records were the only way to keep track of people for a long time until computers came along. Now we can, theoretically, keep record of anything about anyone (or everyone) without running out of physical storage space. Yes, your marriage records, death records, tax records, and credit score are all still kept on record, most of which are accessible by employers, renters, etc. Now, however, there's so much more data being recorded, we leave trails referred to as "data exhaust." The trail of data we leave includes *all* of one's digital or online activities, i.e. purchasing histories, search histories, online posts, etc.<sup>3</sup> Between all the information being kept, surely somewhere along the line it is possible that something considered worthy of shame gets recorded and eventually found.

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<sup>3</sup> Definition from "What Is Data Exhaust?" (Techopedia).

Miller expands on how the scale of records being kept, in tandem with how easily accessible much of the information is, makes it difficult to leave some things in the past:

In the age of digitised [*sic*] record keeping and continuous collection of data, there are no physical or practical limitations to the duration that data about individuals can be kept, nor on the ease of access of such data. As a result, there is a danger that individuals will never be able to overcome their pasts. No transgression or misdemeanour [*sic*] will ever be forgotten, no second chances will ever be granted.

(130)

While not everything *should* necessarily be left in the past, it is clear that, due to advances in technology, most things are not *capable* of being left in the past, and whether or not they should

be left there is irrelevant. Consider people whose videos of them overdosing go viral online and their identities are stated for others to see. Even though many of these people may eventually be in recovery and sober, reentering society as a functioning citizen will be difficult.



Their family members, friends, neighbors, and romantic partners all have access to the information and will associate them with the shameful behavior. When applying for jobs or housing, a simple Google search of their name can surely be enough for employers and renters to turn those people away. These videos enable us to stereotype people according to what little

information we have, perhaps offering “only a few terrible frames of a complicated life” (Seelye, et al.).

The digital surveillance society in which we live contributes to the online flurry which, for those who have the platform, inevitably prompts a YouTube apology video insofar as it tracks more information about individuals than ever before. In the cases of Jeffree Star and Laura Lee, they are being called out for things they’ve said in their pasts. Logan Paul, Justine Sacco, and the subjects of viral overdose videos are gaining attention for their actions in present time. Either way, each individual person is reduced to those actions. It is these bleak moments of their lives which define them in the eyes of the online collective, which, it seems, can quickly turn into a mob.

Once a story goes viral, there’s no shortage of people, like a kind of morality police, ready to join forces and jump in with their opinions on the basis of the limited information with which they’ve been presented. Much as Ronson puts forth in the closing of his online shaming talk at TEDLondon (*When Online Shaming Goes Too Far*):

Maybe there's two types of people in the world: those people who favor humans over ideology, and those people who favor ideology over humans. I favor humans over ideology, but right now, the ideologues are winning, and they're creating a stage for constant artificial high dramas where everybody's either a magnificent hero or a sickening villain, even though we know that's not true about our fellow humans.

What's true is that we are clever and stupid...

In other words, while we may have seemingly endless information about others being collected in our current society, as it exists online, it is in a vacuum. This information, presented without

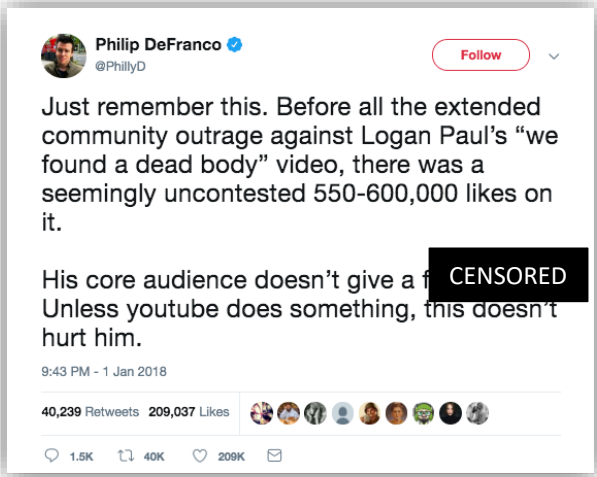
context, is very limited in scope and people on the other side of the screen are rarely interested in the details. We judge people according to a black and white scale when, really, there's far more that exists in the gray areas than can truly be captured by our surveillance society.

### Purpose of the Apology Video

In the times of Hester Prynne, those who committed a sin often felt obligated to make

dramatic, public displays of remorse, begging for forgiveness or publicly prostrating themselves.

Today's subjects of digital shaming face similar pressures, yet it is difficult to break through the outrage in an attempt to humanize oneself. A publicly-shared apology posted via social media is often a preferred way of trying to revive one's



reputation. For social media influencers, who already have a large following and may be dependent on their reputation for their livelihood, the pressure to publicly apologize may be greater, which helps explain why there are so many "YouTube apology videos". Unlike average users, people with large YouTube followings have the perfect platform to attempt to confront the controversy head on in their efforts to save face. Logan Paul is able to respond directly to his controversy on his own accord more so than Justine Sacco or subjects of viral overdosing videos ever could because of his large following of 59.1 million followers between all social media accounts at the time. Paul receives seemingly instantaneous backlash for his video in suicide forest and claims he felt as though the entire world hated him. Certainly, it seemed most people agreed on the inappropriateness of his video. That is, most people except for many of his

subscribers. Indeed, another YouTube personality, Philip DeFranco, tweets that, before the outrage over his video really broke, it had collected 550-600,000 likes (Ng, 2018). A large portion of his subscribers appeared less than concerned with the video and many even defended him, criticizing those who were bashing on him and advocated either that he deserves to be forgiven or that he did nothing wrong in the first place. Those who really took issue with it was seemingly everyone else in the general population, including celebrities who utilized their platforms to share their opinions which likely helped bring the issue to the fore even faster.

Following this global backlash, Paul posts a short, written apology with which most people are dissatisfied and criticize him for not taking the incident seriously enough. Not even 24 hours later, he uploads a short apology video in which he, among other things, actually asks his fans to stop defending him, admitting that his actions don't deserve to be defended (Logan Paul Vlogs). Shortly after this post, he uploads a video serving as a public service announcement for suicide prevention and informs the audience he'll be donating \$1 million to various suicide prevention organizations (Logan Paul Vlogs). He tweets that he will be taking a break to give him time to reflect and doesn't post for a month. Between Laura Lee's apology video and that of Paul, most would agree his comes off as more genuine. Plenty of people still criticize his video, claiming it's not enough to fix what he's done or to demonstrate he understands the gravity of a situation of which he made light. Now, whether or not his initial attempts at redeeming himself by apologizing and showing remorse are enough, his seemingly genuine attempts still stand a better chance of saving his reputation with the world than would the attempts of someone without the same following. Although Paul briefly loses subscribers, various entertainment deals with YouTube, and around \$5 million, a year later he is approaching nearly 4 million *more* subscribers than he had

prior to the incident and has new entertainment deals in the works, such as his podcast, documentary, and animated series (Logan Paul Vlogs). Sacco, on the other hand, did not bounce back as quickly and her reputation may never recover quite like Paul's.

Not only does Paul have multiple platforms through which he regularly gained attention from millions of Americans, but he is also invited for interviews by entities with similarly large audience numbers, e.g. famous YouTube star, Casey Neistat, and ABC news. Neither Justine Sacco nor subjects of overdosing videos are afforded the same kinds of opportunities to redeem themselves. For those with less of a following, it is more likely their attempts to redeem themselves become lost in the storm of online shaming than stand out. Unlike Paul, Sacco was not engaged in widely broadcasted interviews. Although she issued an apology to South African newspaper *The Star* and *ABC News*, less people are paying attention to her actions after her infamous tweet (Dimitrova, 2013). They got what they needed from her tweet and they are comfortable making assumptions about her on the basis of said tweet. People were paying attention to Logan before and after the controversy. People weren't paying attention to Sacco before the tweet and, for the most part, they weren't paying attention to her after the fact either. Like Ronson said, she has been defined according to that action, in a vacuum, without context.

Without the ability to inject oneself into the narrative of the controversy, people are too easily reduced to their actions. Online, in a moment of viral public shaming, it is easy to reduce people to the behaviors for which they are being punished. If a person can remind people of their humanity, the fact that they do indeed have flaws and can make poor judgements, like everyone else, people hope others will recognize that humanity and be more willing to see past those behaviors in question. This is where the apology video comes in. It can serve as an opportunity to

respond to the controversy head on, but, as you can see from backlash over Laura Lee's "fake apology" video, not just *any* apology video will do.

Unlike most of the general population, famous people like Logan Paul stand a better chance of humanizing themselves in the eyes of the public because of how much more attention they receive. It is not possible to reduce Paul to the suicide forest video alone simply because of how much more available content of and by him exists and is given attention. His controversial video is interpreted within the context of his other videos and posts, including his attempts to make up for his mistakes. It is likely his previously standing fame which earned him a slot on ABC News and Casey Neistat's channel. Perhaps it is also because the world already sees Logan Paul as more multi-dimensional, more human, than it sees Justine Sacco or the subjects of viral overdosing videos that he is offered the chance by other entities to attempt to explain and potentially humanize himself. Surely those who are perceived with more humanity already seem more deserving of the chance to humanize oneself than those perceived with less humanity.

Damage from online shaming is unmeasured and virtually unmonitored whereas Hester Prynne continued to live amidst the people who shamed her. This means those who participate in the online shaming can forget about the subject of the shaming as soon as the interest fades, but, like Hester, the target of shaming is still affected well after the shaming takes place. While people may think the interest in the controversy dies once something new comes along and that, for this reason, making a YouTube apology video is pointless because the damage has been done, others would disagree. For average people without a massive social media following and a platform to respond to their online shaming, their reputation (such as the Google search results of their name) is stained by the behaviors for which they received such shaming. A person who was once



recorded on video publicly overdosing, for example, may struggle to escape scrutiny, even if they successfully achieve sobriety. For popular social media influencers like Logan Paul, their search results will show both the shameful behavior as well as their apology videos. In this sense, while it's impossible for them to ever escape their past behavior, it will always be followed up by their attempts recognize their faults and demonstrate remorse. In that regard, it seems they are better suited for earning a second chance by people, as is seemingly the case for Paul, now approaching 19 million subscribers and engaged in a new variety of entertainment projects. Well, as Logan



Paul himself says, "everyone deserves second chances, bro," ("Logan Paul Says"). However, even if everyone is *deserving* of second chances, there is an obvious disparity between those who actually get them and those who do not.

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# Directed Versus Reflective Gestures

## by Jordan Kafka

### Introduction

Researchers Philip Cash and Anja Maier build off of earlier findings that gestures support cognitive and communicative aspects of a discussion. Along with this, they found that gestures can be either reflective towards oneself or directed towards other participants. Cash and Maier say that reflective gestures are marked by gaze directed down, no vocalization, posture not orientated towards others, and hands lowered (Cash et al, 2016:15). Furthermore, they characterize directed gestures as gaze directed at other participants, vocalizations (potentially used to attract attention), posture rotated towards other participants, and hands raised to show the gesture (Cash et al, 2016:15). A main conclusion that Cash and Maier drew from their research was that reflective and directed gestures occur during different types of gestures (deictic, iconic, beat, etc.), depending on the structure and function of the gesture.

Bavelas says that beat gestures are categorized by simple strokes used to emphasize words or indicate off-propositional linguistic relationships instead of advancing the topic of discourse. She notes that iconic gestures are an echo or elaboration on speech that is usually accompanied by movements to produce an abstract meaning. Lastly, deictic gestures are indicative motions usually for demonstration or for when the participant can see the gesture (Bavelas et al, 1992:472-3). Along with this, reflective and directed gesturing supports David McNeil's idea that gestures reveal aspects of inner mental processes and points of views (McNeil, 1992:109). As will be discussed in the present study, participants' gestures subconsciously reveal the imagistic form of his or her sentences.

This study will also explore mimicked gestures in conjunction with reflective or directed gestures in conversation. Mimicking of gestures facilitates joint construction of meaning in conversation. It represents the simultaneous realization of shared knowledge between two or more participants. Furthermore, it is noted that the mimicking of gestures can display alignment and collaboration between two or more participants (Chui, 2014:76-7).

Lastly, this study will analyze preference organization. Pillet-Shore says that people systematically design their actions to either support or undermine social solidarity (Pillet-Shore, 2017:1). In other words, recipients can respond to prior talk or gesturing in either a preferred or dispreferred manner.

### **Data and Method**

The data for this study was acquired via video recordings of an uninterrupted, natural interaction. The types of interactions include storytelling and explanations. The topics of discourse include parents going to the bar, plans for homecoming, and how two participants do not like frozen grapes. The video recording was taken at a house in Durham, New Hampshire. The participants include myself (JK) and four friends; PS, EL, SD, and ZT. Ethnographically, it shall be noted that all participants are very close friends and all but PS live in the house where the interaction was recorded.

### **Analysis**

As mentioned previously, directed and reflective gestures occur in interactions according to the structure and function of the gesture. This analysis will take a closer look at examples of

directed and reflective gestures in conversation. It will also explore alignment, mimicked gestures, and preference organization.

### **Example 1: Reflective Beat Gesture**

The first example is of a beat gesture that is reflective. During this segment of interaction, SI is engaging in storytelling. She is talking to JK, EL, ZT, and PS regarding a hypothetical situation of her mother coming to the bar. Excerpt one (lines 01-08) and framegrab one exemplify this reflective beat gesture.

#### **Excerpt One: Reflective Beat- video 2 10:25-10:33**

01 SD: \*If I kept my mom on the \*dance=\*I think my mom would just be like

02 <shocked at the wa:y-> (.)

03 ((\*SD gestures hand upwards)) ((\*SD gestures hand downwards to

04 represent dance floor)) ((\*SD gestures hand by moving it to

05 emphasis of words))

06 EL: We are, hhaha.

07 SD: People touch each other hhh haha=

08 ZT: =\*Yes ((\*ZT points finger at SD in agreement))

#### **Framegrab One- Reflective Beat**



As seen in framegrab one, SI is performing a beat gesture in a reflective manner. According to Cash et al's conclusions on reflective gesturing, SI meets all requirements. SI's gaze is directed down and towards her gesture. Her body is in home position and she is making no attempt to torque her body or create an f-formation, with the other participants. Along with this, her hands are centered with her body and not raised. This demonstrates her lack of intention for the other participants to see her gesture. Considering this, her beat gesture is done as a reflective tool to get her point across.

It is noted that compound reflections highlight the importance of walkthrough-type gestures for idea development. Furthermore, reflective gestures are used to support cognition in planning out reasoning and speech as well as formulating and communicating mental simulations (Cash et al, 2016:139). This phenomenon is relevant in the present example because SI's beat gesture walks through her mental processes of formulating an opinion on her mother. According to excerpt one, SI did this gesture and turn constructional unit in a hesitant and slow manner. As seen in line 02, SI slowly says "shocked at the way," pauses for a brief moment, and then finishes her thought in line 07 by saying "people touch each other". Her contemplative speech accompanied by a reflective beat gesture signifies SI's walkthrough/formulation of her thoughts.

In line 08, ZT is seen affiliating with SD via a pointing gesture and vocalization. Framegrab two shows ZT's affiliation via an interactive directed gesture.

## Framegrab Two: Directed Iconic Affiliation



As seen in framegrab two, ZT pointing at SD while saying the word “yes” serves as her recognition and affiliation to SD’s prior talk. This pointing gesture serves as interactive and directed towards participants. It is interactive because it refers to some aspect of the process of conversing with another person, but does not coincide with the topic of discourse (Bavelas, 1992:473). Although ZT’s eye gaze is not accessible from the framegrab, it is assumed that this is a directed gesture. ZT points away from her body, towards SD’s line of view. It is noted that vocalizations simply align a participant with the activity in progress, but gestures such as nods or pointing provide access, understanding, and alignment to the teller’s stance (Stivers, 2008:31). Although ZT does not nod, her gesture goes beyond alignment since alignment is typically marked by vocal continuers only. Along with this, ZT provides the preferred response to SD’s prior talk by responding on time, without hesitation, and with a remark that supports SD’s turn at talk. It is clear that SD was looking for a response from the participants when she torques her head, gazes, and laughs towards the participants even before ZT provides a response in line 08.

## **Example 2: Directed Iconic and Deictic Gestures**

The next example represents a directed deictic gesture and a directed iconic gesture by SI. In this sequence of interaction, SI is explaining to the participants how the living room can be adjusted to accommodate for friends staying on homecoming weekend. In doing so, she directs her attention to the participants with the intention of them seeing her gestures. Excerpt two and framegrabs three and four represent SI's directed iconic and directed deictic gestures during an explanation sequence.

### **Excerpt Two: Directed Iconic/Deictic- video two 08:55-9:09**

01 SD: \*> I mean we can just< do the thing where we push  
02 that back and like we just [\*pull the blankets out you  
03 know.  
04 **((\*SD torques head towards JK and uses hand gestures and**  
05 **pointing))**  
06 **((\*SD does iconic gesture about pulling blanket out))**  
07 JK: [Yeah.  
08 EL: Yeah.  
09 SD: Like [\*>one two three< four five six seven,  
10 **((\*SD points to open space))**  
11 E: [It's like a homeless shelter? hhh.  
12 J: \*The ↑ tent in the backyard  
13 (1.0) **((\*JK torques head towards EL))**  
14 E: That [would be funny the next day.  
15 J: [\*Emma- the tent in the backyard hha.  
16 **((\*SD removes gaze from JK, EL torques head towards JK))**  
17 E: \*hhh. **((\*SD torques head back to home position))**

Before exploring the direct iconic and deictic gestures from excerpt two, it must be noted that SD was involved in multiple activities during this sequence of interaction. SD was involved with both the conversation at hand, and with a homework assignment on her laptop. Considering these involvements, SD needs to torque her head, eye sockets, and part of her torso in order to



demonstrate a directed gesture that can be seen by her recipients. However, she treats her homework as the dominant involvement since she stays in an unstable position during the involvement of gesturing. Furthermore, she never creates an f-formation with her recipients while gesturing, and she eventually returns to a home position towards her laptop in line 17 (Schegloff, 1998). Framegrab three demonstrates SD's directed iconic gesture.

### Framegrab Three: Directed Iconic



The first gesture seen in this sequence of action is a directed iconic gesture. This occurs at line 02 when SD says, “pull the blankets out”. As she says this, she moves her hand back and forth, representing the action of pulling a blanket out of a bin on the living room floor. This is an iconic gesture in the sense that it is an illustrative motion of a real object that is tied to speech (Cash et al, 2016:127). This gesture also serves as directed since SD intends for the participants to see it. Her gaze travels back and forth between her gesture and the participants in order to gain and keep their attention. Along with this, the gesture is raised, she vocalizes, and her head is torqued out of home position. This is a demonstrative gesture that is intended to be seen by participants and is associated with an idea and explanation (Cash et al, 2016:127). Furthermore, this gesture serves as ‘compound directed one-way’. According to Cash et al, this is when a participant physically acts out a complex structure or mechanism to illustrate related ideas to one or more

team members. Compound directed one-way gestures are also marked by key characteristics such as introducing a new core idea, offering clarification, or seeking agreement or acceptance from the other participants (Cash et al, 2016:131). These characteristics hold true in terms of SD's iconic gesture. She is offering a new idea of 'pulling the blankets out' to accommodate for guests on homecoming. She is also seeking acceptance and agreement of this new idea in line 02-03 when she says, 'you know'. This agreement is met in lines 07-08 when JK and EL both say, 'yeah'.

In terms of recipient design, EL and JK offer the preferred second pair part response. After SD performs a directed iconic gesture, she looks for approval or acceptance from the other participants in lines 02-03 when she asks, "you know". She also seeks approval when she gazes at the recipients after this turn constructional unit. According to Pillet-Shore, a preferred response in this scenario would be simple, straightforward, without delay, and supportive of the prior talk (Pillet-Shore, 2017:4). JK and EL respond promptly, and without hesitation. This is emphasized via JK's overlap talk of approval in line 07. Before SD even finishes her explanation, JK accepts her proposal and does so in a non-hesitant, simple manner.

The next framegrab, framegrab four, corresponds to excerpt two. SD presents a directed, deictic gesture (DDG) in lines 09-10 when she says, "like one, two, three, four, five, six, seven". In this example, SD is pointing at open spaces where people could potentially sleep in the living room on homecoming.

#### Framegrab Four: Directed Deictic



Similar to the last gesture, this gesture is also directed, however it is deictic. As mentioned earlier, deictic gestures are typically used for demonstration, such as with pointing. It is noted that, “deictic gestures were found to be associated with directing attention to specific documents or design elements of interest to the initiator in line prior work (Cash et al, 2016:139). In this example, SD is seen directing the attention of other participants to an element of interest regarding where people can sleep in the living room. She does so by structuring the gesture in a directed manner so that the recipients can jointly attend to her gestures. Beyond this, it is a directed gesture because SD torques her head and torso, and she is not in a stable home position. She also raises her arm as to gain the attention of the recipients and involve them in the importance of the gesture. In this scenario, SD’s turn constructional unit would not make sense without the deictic gesture to demonstrate her thought process.

Another important aspect to the directed deictic gesture in framegrab four is that SD’s gesture establishes a point of visual focus for her recipients. Goodwin explains that this is a resource for participants to make use of the organization of their ongoing action (Goodwin, 1986:31-2). In this scenario, SD uses her deictic directed gesture to both create a mutual visual

focus with her recipients, and also make sense of what she is explaining. Moreover, SD is then faced with the challenge of when and to whom she returns her gaze.

### **Example 3: Mimicked Iconic Gesture as Reflective and Directed**

The last example from this study concerns a mimicked iconic gesture as both reflective and directed. In this example, EL is describing how she thinks frozen grapes are 'mushy'. In doing so, she reflectively clenches her fingers and puts them towards her face to demonstrate how the grapes are 'mushy'. SD then makes the same gesture in order to align with EL, however she does so in a directed manner. Excerpt three and framegrab five represent an iconic gesture as both reflective and directed.

#### **Excerpt Three: Mimicked Iconic Reflective/Directed- video two 16:07-16:29**

01. SD: People say that [they're like °ca:ndy°
02. EL: [They're like \*mu::shy=
03. ((\*EL makes squishing hand movement by face))
04. SD: =**They're like \*slu::shy, \*they're like slu:shy.**
05. **((\*SD mimics same hand gesture by face))**
06. **((\*SD torques head to show EL gesture))**

#### **Framegrab Six: Mimicked Iconic Reflective/Directed**



It is noted that the mimicking of gestures facilitates joint construction of meaning in conversation. It represents the simultaneous realization of shared knowledge between two or

more participants (Chui, 2014). A mimicking hand gesture is done by SD in order to align with EL's opinion. This gesture creates a mutual understanding and joint construction of meaning between SD and EL. Along with alignment, this mimicked gesture also allows SD to collaborate with EL. Chui says that there are three stages to mimicked gestures; the presentation phase, the collaboration phase, and the completion phase. The presentation phase concerns why the mimicked gesture occurs in the first place. In this scenario, it occurs due to a perceived disagreement. In line 01, SD says "people say that they're like candy". After SD can complete her thought, EL disagrees by saying "they're like mushy". It is noted that, "After the presentation stage is the collaboration phase during which the other participant expresses his or her own understanding of a referent being mentioned in the first speaker's turn" (Chui, 2014:79). In this phase, alignment is the driving force for joint construction of meaning. Once EL gestures that the grapes are mushy, SD mimics the gesture in agreement. Lastly, the completion phase is marked by new meanings being recognized and accepted (Chui, 2014:82). By the end of this sequence, EL and SD have jointly reached a new understanding on the grapes being mushy via their mimicked hand gesture.

Moving on to the directed and reflective aspects of this mimicked gesture, EL presents the gesture as reflective while SD presents it in a directed manner. EL remains in home position and her gaze is directed down towards the gesture. On the other hand, SD torques her head and torso towards EL, directs her gaze at EL, and raises her gesture to make it visible. This supports Cash et al's phenomenon that the same type of gesture can be either reflective or directed depending on the structure and function of the gesture.

This mimicked gesture also serves to reflect inner mental processes of SD and EL. As mentioned before, McNeil says that gestures reveal points of views and imagistic forms of

participants (McNeil, 1992:109). In this example, SD and EL's gesture for 'mushy' reveals their imagistic view of frozen grapes in a negative, disgusted manner.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the differences between reflective and directed gestures in interactions such as storytelling and explanations. This work built off of and contributed to Philip Cash and Anja Maier's findings on the role of gestures in conversation. Cash et al say that there are reflective and directed gestures. Reflected are categorized by gaze down at gesture, posture in home position, no vocalizations, and hands lowered. Directed gestures are categorized as gaze directed towards participants, body torqued, vocalizations, and hands raised to show the gesture. A main conclusion that Cash et al found was that different categories of gestures can be either reflective or directive depending on the structure and function of the gesture.

Another key focus of this study highlighted mimicked gestures (either directed or reflective) in relation to joint meaning and alignment. Chui says that, mimicked gestures represent the simultaneous realization of shared knowledge between two or more participants (Chui, 2014). Furthermore, mimicked gestures can show affiliation between two or more participants.

Lastly, this study explored preference organization as a systematic design which allows participants to either support or undermine social solidarity. Pillet-Shore (2017), emphasizes the preferred responses to certain first pair parts, and these preferred responses are also relevant in terms of reflective and directed gestures.

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# Porn & Millennials

## Porn and Millennials: How a Generation is Changing a Century-Long Stigma

By Kristiana Osborne

### **Ancient Forms of Pornography**

In the digital age, pornography is brought to you by video cameras and broadband access; however, it existed long before these technologies were developed. Not only is digital pornography a product of modernity, but the actual definition itself is a modern concept. When looking at ancient civilizations, the first known erotic representation of humans was much different than modern pornography. It was found in sexualized stone and wood carvings from as early as 30,000 years ago (Pappas, 2010). Ancient Peruvians used ceramic pottery for painting sexual scenes, while the Japanese were carving erotic images into woodblocks. As we fast forward through history, we see further carvings, figurines, and representations of the early stages of pornography, “the ancient Greeks and Romans created public sculptures and frescos depicting homosexuality, threesomes, fallatio, and cunnilingus” (Pappas, 2010). These depictions continued across cultures globally during the scribal and oral eras.

‘Pornography’, in this time period, was primarily based on religious icons, worship, and fertility symbols. While there were different meanings and motives behind the creation of these



sexualized images, it is clear that the sexuality of humans has been a point of interest for years.

While modern porn hardly resembles images from this period, the expression of sexuality remains the same.

### **The Birth of Modern Pornography**

Along with the invention of the camera, magazine, and television, modern pornography started to emerge. However, in some ways, the public's attitudes about sex were more reserved than those of the past. Pornography no longer represented worship, it was instead dismissed as extremely taboo. It wasn't until 1749 that the first full-length English pornographic novel, *Memoirs of a Woman Pleasure* (also known as *Fanny Hill*), was released. This violated every social norm that surrounded human sexuality in this time. In result, the author, John Cleland, was arrested and jailed immediately after the publication. However, the Supreme Court's decision to deem the book protected under the first amendment, can be credited as the start of mainstream pornographic censorship in America (Graham, 2013). Although John Cleland was able to successfully publish a pornographic novel, the stigma around the subject was still evident.

The technology of the modern era was the driving factor of innovation in the porn industry; the more exposure that the industry got, the more popular it became. Not only were magazines being published, but pornography was expanding to the photography and film markets as well. By the 1800s, short erotic films started to take over the industry.

For many years, these films remained at the top of the pornographic market. "Then, in the 1970s, changing social mores opened the door for public showing of explicit films" (Pappas, 2010).

However, even with public showings, acquiring or purchasing pornography was comparatively more difficult than today, “adult porn magazine shops and theaters existed, but they were often in the ‘seedy’ parts of town” (Soha, Draft, 2018). It wasn’t until the 1980s that the invention of VHS and VCR allowed for people to watch these films at home.

While these ‘home-viewing’ inventions changed the industry, nothing was more revolutionary to pornography than the invention of the Internet.

### **Porn in the Post-Modern World**

The Internet has not experienced a more monumental transition since the emergence of online porn. Considering that the topic of pornography is almost always avoided in society, it is easy to forget that it generates a substantial percentage of all Internet traffic. While the increased access to porn can be perceived as a positive change, there are rightfully many issues that surround the topic, “one of the challenging aspects of the issue of pornography and the Internet is that, like so many things, the Internet makes any form of pornography available, from the artistic and creative to the violent and grotesque” (Soha, Draft, 2018). Although the ethics of pornography are relevant and should be taken into consideration, this paper will focus more specifically on the Internet's influence in normalizing the practice. By growing up with easy access to porn, millennials are changing their perceptions on the topic through anonymity, virtual reality, social media, and memes.

## **Anonymity in Porn**

Before the Internet, porn was something you did in secret; it was kept hidden and private. The Internet not only granted the ability to share and access pornography freely but it gave people something that they were never granted before, anonymity. Since pornography is still extremely taboo, people are more willing to download or watch porn if it is in the privacy of their own homes. The porn industry completely revolutionized itself during this transition to digital platforms. Physical copies of porn were deemed obsolete once hundreds of videos were accessible anonymously online.

While full anonymity is hard to achieve in the digital age, the idea that porn can be accessed without disclosing personal information makes it more appealing. Users of Reddit, 4Chan, and Tumblr commend the anonymity of their platforms and often argue that it is the reason for their devotion to the website; Porn viewers are no different. Carnegie Mellon's department of psychology interviewed 44 people from around the world regarding their experiences with online anonymity. When asked why they choose to remain anonymous "over half of the interviewees used anonymity for illegal or malicious activities ... or they engaged in socially undesirable activities like browsing sites depicting violence or pornography" (Kang, Brown, Kiesler, pg 3). This desire to remain anonymous is directly linked to hidden and taboo behavior like porn.

While many porn viewers choose to remain anonymous, it does not stop them from engaging with others online. In fact, the idea of anonymity has encouraged the use of online pornographic chat rooms and virtual interactions.

## **Porn in Virtual Reality**

Along with anonymity, people value online community very highly. It is extremely common for people to turn to the Internet in search of friendships and connection. Furthermore, the Internet acts as an anonymous safe haven to talk about things that one might not discuss in their 'real' lives. After already establishing the taboo nature of porn, it only makes sense that people looking to engage in conversation about the topic turn to digital communities.

Internet Communities, Virtual Reality is a podcast that looks at six different Internet communities.

One example that was discussed was the virtual world of Second Life. When a woman named Karen became overweight and house bound, the only place she felt that she could live a normal life was in the virtual world. After passing away from infection, the platform's community was so strong that Karen's digital friends held a memorial service to mourn her loss.

While users of Second Life may have innocent intentions of wanting to live a better life like Karen, others turn to the platform because of the highly immersive visual, audio, and role-playing cyber-sex. Journalist D. Yvette Wohn wanted to understand the obsession with virtual realities like Second Life, so she conducted an 18-month study observing and interviewing users who have experience with sex on Second Life.

Virtual porn is so popular that "among the diverse operations that flourish in Second Life, sex has become one of the biggest industries" (Wohn, 2009). As a non-user, the idea that virtual reality can be compared to pornography may seem strange; however, to users, it is extremely equivalent. Second Life users think of cyber-sex as an enhanced form of pornography; they are not strictly viewers because they are interacting with one another during the affair. One second life user describes the experience: "watching the animation is very much like watching porn,

except you are the actual character in the porn” (Wohn, 2009). Like Karen, these users place strong value on relationships formed in Second Life.

While porn in virtual reality may seem far from a community, the interactions have meaning and are inherently the same as relationships formed on other platforms. Without anonymity, platforms like Second Life would not be as successful in forming these relationships as it is now. Any digital community, regardless of intentions, relies heavily on anonymity, freedom to engage, and networked individualism. This type of individualism is when person to person connection is valued over place to place connection (Miller, 2012). People using virtual realities are not concerned with physical location, they are instead looking to form connections through common interests and personal connection.

Platforms like Second Life are created with the intention to bring people together. However, the porn industry has taken virtual reality to a new level. Porn can also be found on platforms that require absolutely no person to person contact at all. Surprisingly, the advancements in virtual porn are far beyond many mainstream technologies. A man by the name of Scott, received a Virtual Reality headset for Christmas. While exploring the different ‘games’ on the device, he soon came across a free studio called VirtualRealityPorn. Living in the digital age, Scott had never paid for porn in his life and curiously downloaded the program to his phone.

Scott clicked the first video, ‘The Neighbors and You’, and tuned into his headset. The scene begins by showing a male body, presumably Scott’s, covered in bed sheets. Within seconds, three women walk through the door and crawl into the bed. Sounds of whispers and compliments are played through the headset and he recalls the voices being ‘extremely lifelike’. Based on the genre, the remainder of the scene is predictable; Scott and the 3 women engage in ‘cyber-sex’ for

the rest of the experience. He recalls that when the 3 women made 'eye-contact' with him, it seemed as though he was really staring into their eyes (Rubin, 2018).

Two thoughts ran through Scott's head: 'this is not what I was expecting' and 'I want to see more of it'. Surprisingly, Scott is not alone in his curiosity for more. With the release of virtual reality headsets, Pornhub saw their virtual reality videos views jump from around 400,000 a day to more than 900,000" (Rubin, 2018). While both Second Life and headsets provide virtual reality, they are essentially un-comparable. Not only are the avatars in headsets not controlled by 'real' individuals, but they are extremely more realistic than those on Second Life. Because the headset allows the user to view 'their' own body engaging in the act, it is more lifelike than watching two avatars on a screen. Scott could not believe how immersive the virtual reality was, "everything made me realize that this is more than just watching a video in 3-D. When a woman comes up close to your face, you can feel the heat coming off her, you imagine that you feel her breath. Your brain is tricked into sensations that aren't there because of the ones that are there" (Rubin, 2018).

In addition to straight men, virtual reality porn caters to women, homosexuals, and even fetishes. While the market is huge, it is no surprise that a large majority of virtual reality users are millennials. Not only is over half the generation interested in virtual realities, but Pornhub reported that millennials were 57% more likely to engage in virtual reality porn than any other age group (Scarola, 2017). As virtual reality's popularity increases, porn will become even more accessible. Millennial's high exposure to technologies like Second Life and headsets, will increase the discourse surrounding porn, making it appear less taboo.

While virtual reality is a driving factor in millennials shifting perspective on porn, it is not the only rising technology normalizing the topic. Surprisingly, porn stars are starting to gain popularity as influencers on more mainstream networked communities like YouTube.

### **Porn on YouTube**

While actual pornography is banned from YouTube, the community still finds ways to infiltrate the network. “YouTube is a giant community made of millions and millions of channels and hundreds of millions of users, and then in there, there’s these little subsets of communities” (PBSoffbook, 2013). The porn community has created a subset that involves porn stars posting videos on YouTube of their experiences, suggested products, and answers to viewer’s questions.

YouTube is a video outlet that people use to talk about things they love. Tyler Oakley is a famous vlogger on YouTube that talks about updates in his life, pop culture, and virtually anything that interests him. There are thousands of well-known YouTubers, similar to Tyler, who marketers value more than traditional advertising methods. The film, *Generation Like*, interviews stars like Tyler to explore the influential power and importance of online influencers. The skeptical nature of millennials makes them especially hard to target with traditional advertising. However, millennials generally view YouTubers as regular people and do not perceive them as manipulative or money driven. For this reason, young adults often look at influencers as peers and trust their opinions and recommendations, “that’s why companies need kids to stay online, clicking and liking and tweeting” (Koughan, Rushkoff, 14:49).

In a study conducted by Defy Media, 63% of millennials said they were more likely to try a brand, product, or watch a movie if it had been recommended by a YouTube star (Arnold, 2017). While pornography websites are not necessarily looking to sell products, sponsoring YouTube personalities generates discourse and even interest in the industry. Advertisement in the porn industry is especially difficult because it is not something that can be broadcast on television or placed in a magazine. However, platforms like YouTube are the perfect place for pornography to be promoted; People can talk about virtually anything and “there’s no one saying ‘you can’t say that’” (Koughan, Rushkoff, 9:29).

Lena Nersesian, also known as Lena the Plug, is a famous YouTube influencer with over a million subscribers. However, she didn’t gain her popularity on the video platform like Tyler, she was instead originally known for her videos on a variety of pornography websites. After finding success in the porn industry, she added to her online presence by creating a YouTube channel, “Lena describes her videos as 'daily stories, naughty features and occasional direct chat', and earlier this year she sparked controversy when she promised to release a sex tape if she got to one million followers on YouTube” (Pike, 2017). Not only does she self-promote by promising videos, but she also acts a spokesperson for pornographic platforms like Camiversity and Pornhub.

Many of Lena’s YouTube videos are directly related to her pornographic videos. Before posting her pornographic films on Pornhub, she records herself getting ready, explains the theme of the upcoming film, and even shows blurred previews. With well over a million subscribers, all of whom obviously interested pornography, Lena successfully promotes her videos to the perfect demographic. By showing previews and talking about her videos, viewers are very likely to then go to Pornhub and watch the full film.



Millennials perception of YouTubers as regular people further assists in breaking the stigma around porn. It is easy to dehumanize porn stars when someone's entire knowledge of them is strictly from their pornography. As these stars move to social media platforms like YouTube, Twitter, and Snapchat, we start to see more of their everyday lives and think of them as 'real' people.

As millennials start to perceive porn stars differently, their overall opinions on pornography change as well. While social media is a large player in reducing the stigma around porn, the Internet provides other ways of normalizing the topic.

### **Porn Memes**

Like many things, the Internet took pornography to a whole new level. It is extremely common to see serious or controversial topics displayed across mediums as jokes or memes. Memes "can frame content as positive or negative, serious or joking, or any number of things" (Mandiberg, p 125). It is no surprise that the Internet turned porn into a meme because of the taboo nature of the topic. Memes are a unique form of discourse. Since they are primarily viewed as comedic artifacts, they can address topics that are not commonly talked about. In fact, memes about avoided or taboo topics are often the ones that gain the most popularity, and pornography is no different. In 2003 a song from the Broadway musical Avenue Q quickly turned into a famous Internet meme.

The lyrics:

The Internet is really really great... for porn!

I've got a fast connection so I don't have to wait... for porn!

There's always some new site... for porn! I browse all day and night... for porn!

It's like I'm surfing at the speed of light... for porn!

The Internet is for porn! The Internet is for porn!

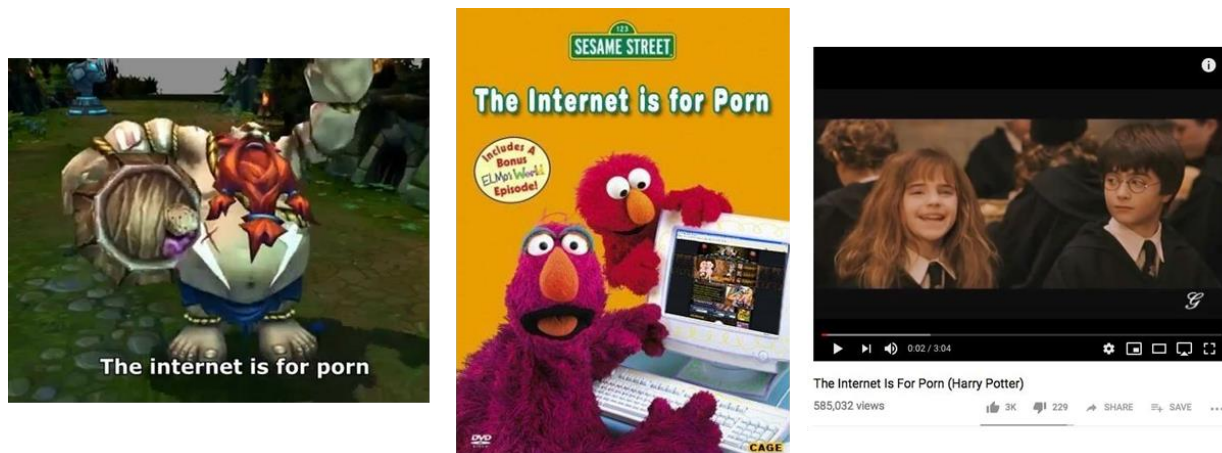
Why you think the net was born?

Porn! Porn! Porn!

(Jackson, 2012)

The Internet did what it does best, it found this comical but relatable artifact and turned it into a meme. If one were to YouTube search 'the Internet is for porn' over 1,500 results would appear.

Each video meme shows a clip of a popular show or genre, with the soundtrack of the song edited into the background. The meme spread through all corners of the Internet and can be seen alongside a wide variety of media, ranging from World of Warcraft, Harry Potter and even to Sesame Street (Masem, Downer, 2018).



These are examples of still images from the YouTube memes regarding 'the Internet is porn'

While this meme was especially popular on YouTube and Reddit, other platforms like 4Chan didn't hesitate to make a meme out of the taboo topic as well. Known as the 'Internet Hate Machine' or the 'darkest corner of the Web', 4Chan is well equipped in joking about controversial topics (Alfonso, 2013). While 4Chan is well known for actually posting pornography, the platform also assisted in creating a meme that would change the way porn is perceived in society.

Memes are often ridden off as comedic and unimportant; however, as we dive deeper in the digital age, we are starting to see the powerful influence they have on society. In Jurgenson's article "Speaking in Memes," he discusses the influence of memes on something as important as presidential campaigns. The article argues that viral phenomenon's, as simple as a meme, can generate discourse between millions of people. Even though Jurgenson is focusing on the topic of politics, the strong influence of memes remains the same. If a meme can generate enough talk about a candidate that it can help them win an election, can it change the way a generation looks at pornography?

The pornographic production company, Brazzers, generates most of their traffic through their famous Internet 'lolz'. The 4Chan board exploded after Brazzers released its first porn meme video 'Meme Lover', "the resulting movie centered around Bane from 'The Dark Knight Rises', the subject of a beloved 4Chan meme, with nods to 'Mad Max' and 'Star Wars'" (Clark-Flory, 2016). Brazzers recreated a porn film by turning it into something one would see on SNL, minus the explicit content. This generated a mass amount of positive feedback and Brazzers did not turn down the free advertisement. The company used the meme to generate discourse about their brand and industry in a similar way that politicians use memes to gain virtual presence.

For Brazzers second meme video they decided to turn to the professionals, the users of 4Chan. Mario Nardstein, Brazzers product director, talks about working with 4Chan and gives them credit for the film's success, "the community was a big help in contributing to the humor of the series, so for this one we decided to take the reins and set up the visual effects, the jokes, the plot, and really give this meme-porn sage the polish it deserved" (Clark-Flory, 2016). Meme Lover 2 now has over 1 million view on YouTube and is one of the most popular porn memes circling the Internet.

The extreme power and influence of memes, can be directly linked to millennials' obsession with them. By creating casual discourse on the topic, young adults are changing the way that porn is treated in society.

### **Millennials' Relationship with Porn**

According to the book *The Porn Phenomenon: The Impact of Pornography in the Digital Age*, many negative connotations about porn are being eradicated by millennials. Not only are young adults less likely to think that viewing porn is wrong, but 56% of them believe that something as innocent as not recycling is a more immoral practice (Josh McDowell, 2016). In addition, "they are also the least likely to say that porn is very bad for society (14%). ...the gap is a 23 percent differential between young adults and boomers (37% compared to 14%)" (McDowell, 2016). While there is no concrete evidence that explains why the numbers are drastically different between boomers and millennials, it is hard to ignore the influence of the Internet and memes.

While this change of opinion is most likely linked the fact that millennials were the first generation to have access to digital porn at a young age, their willingness to admit to their habits can be attributed to viral memes. Millennial's obsession with memes is changing the marketing and political landscape because of the memes potential to create dialogue between people. By this standard, the rise of porn memes result in increased talk about pornography. Because memes are designed to be relatable, seeing a porn meme makes millennials feel less ashamed about their habits since it is common among their peers. Pornography has always been a uncomfortable and avoided topic in our society and for that reason, it has remained extremely taboo. However, as millennials are breaking the silence, their feelings toward porn are shifting.

If memes have the power to influence hundreds of people's opinions on elections and buying habits, they certainly have the potential to change the way the world views pornography. In fact, thanks to millennials, it can be argued that we are baring witnessing to the first wave of porn acceptance.

### **Pornography and Pop Culture**

If you were to ask a Baby Boomer if they would ever attend a porn event, buy porn related merchandise, or watch an award show dedicated to porn stars, they would most likely be extremely uncomfortable with the question. Additionally, in Modernity, the idea of participating in any of these activities would go against every social norm since the creation of traditional pornography.

In September of this year, the first ever Pornhub award show was created. With categories like Best New Starlet, Most Outrageous Sex Scene, Best Group Sex Scene and Most Spectacular Boobs, it's hard to believe that at one point pornography was hidden away as one of society's biggest secrets. Not only does this reflect a completely revolutionized perception of the porn industry, but the use of pop culture in the awards proves the increased normalization of the topic.

Not only did famous artists like Cardi B, Blackbear, and Young M.A generate public interest by performing at the show, but one of the biggest names in pop culture, Kanye West, acted as the creative director of the awards (Clark, 2018). In addition to his musical career, Kanye's clothing line, Yeezy, has been extremely successful and is on track to hit a billion dollars this year. Kanye himself acknowledges that the brand "is the 2nd fastest growing company in history" (Hanbury, 2018). In addition to directing the awards, Kanye debuted his new Yeezy x Pornhub collection. It featured several shirts displaying the categories of various pornography awards, along with cartoons of the winners.



### T-Shirt designs from the Yeezy x Pornhub Collection

While the idea of actually purchasing one of these shirts may seem strange, the line was extremely successful in the 24 hours it was made available. While that may be contributed to Kanye's already established fame, it does not take away from the fact that purchasing and wearing the shirt is a open declaration to liking porn. If YouTube personalities can successfully promote pornography, there is no way of knowing the potential that socially powerful people like Kanye West have on millennials perception of the industry.

## **Revolutionizing Porn in the Post-Modern Era**

Porn has continuously evolved with society and technology, starting as religious symbols and later transforming into an extremely taboo practice. I believe that as generations continue to grow up using the Internet, porn's role in society will drastically shift. Furthermore, I believe that we are just now witnessing the start of the porn industry's next big revolution.

Pornography's infiltration into mainstream media is the first piece of evidence that suggests people's perceptions are changing. If porn remained as taboo as it was treated in Modernity, it would not be able to take on the roles that it has in the Post-Modern era. Extremely taboo topics are not found on mainstream social media, and they are especially not openly addressed by well-known celebrities.

As the first generation to grow up online, millennials are breaking social norms across a variety of genres. Their relationship with porn is significantly different than anything we have seen in the past and I believe that it will continue to progress as future generations are exposed to the digital world at a younger age than ever before. There is no denying that while porn is spreading to mainstream media, there is still a negative stigma surrounding it. Millennials have not completely done away with porn's taboo nature, but I do believe that they are the first generation to consider a shift in perspective. The Internet not only made pornography easier to access, but it also successfully assisted in starting to change the stigma that has been in place for over a century.



## **As a Millennial...**

My relationship with technology is similar to that of most millennials. While I have seen memes about porn and heard talk about Kanye's involvement in the industry, I had never given much thought about my view on the stigma surrounding it. When choosing to tackle such a taboo topic, I was originally reluctant but my curiosity eventually overpowered my hesitation. While researching porn, I found myself lowering the brightness of my computer screen and keeping my analysis relatively private. This proved to me that the stigma is clearly still very present.

However, there were several things that I noticed throughout this experience that assisted in proving my thesis. First: I felt extremely more comfortable disclosing my topic to my fellow millennials over older generations. Second: I noticed that every peer I spoke to displayed instant interest in the topic. Some asked me questions about my discoveries, while others wanted to share personal knowledge or potential subtopic suggestions. Specifically, my research on Lena the Plug was a direct result of a peer recommendation. Another fellow student shared that she had actually seen someone wearing a Yeezy x Pornhub t-shirt in her apartment building. Third: when speaking about the topic with peers I noticed that they did not seem to care about being overheard. Whether it was in the library, dining hall, or at a party, no one displayed signs of embarrassment. There were also times when someone would overhear and join in to share their own inquiries. In conclusion, these experiences not only assisted me in brainstorming subtopics, but they also strengthened my overall argument.

Yes, I felt somewhat uncomfortable initially choosing this topic, but as I witnessed the findings of my research play out in front of me, I realized the statistics are right; Millennials are in fact

altering their perspectives. While obviously still stigmatized and loaded with ethical implications, pornography is quickly moving into mainstream discourse.

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# David Koresh: Irreverently Divine

by Kieran Reardon

## **Introduction:**

This analytical inquiry of David Koresh, and the rise and fall of The Branch Davidians, describes the numerous stages of development of not only Koresh individually, but The Branch Davidians as a cooperative group as well. The Branch Davidians were a religious group who were profoundly misguided through a roller-coaster of imprudent religious policy, disturbing mental and physical abuse of authoritative power, and incredulous manipulation of reality and moral ethics. This essay will progress through many sub-categories that are pertinent to understanding how some societies hold themselves in estranged and sternly unorthodox manners that are damaging to the well-being of those living within them and those living around them. Due to the dark nature of this essay, the main underlying themes that are touched upon throughout are as follows: religious ethics and morality as being relative to independent interpretation, spirituality as an individual quest for self-content, the impact of a singular authority on an entire group's collective self-destruction, the effect of manipulative rhetoric on the human psyche, and human nature displaying exerted passion from the masses as a weapon to society. David Koresh is a contemporary example of an idolized authoritarian who obtained power over others as an attempt at self-redemption for past shortcomings, all at the expense of an entire religion's dignity and numerous innocent lives.

### **The Early Life of David Koresh:**

On August 17, 1959 David Koresh (originally Vernon Wayne Howell) was born in Houston, Texas to a single 14-year-old mother, Bonnie Clark. His father, Bobby Howell, abandoned them while his mother was pregnant; Koresh never met his real father. Through Koresh's very young childhood, his mother's boyfriend was a violently abusive alcoholic to both of them. This left his mother no choice but to send young Koresh to live with his maternal grandmother from ages four through seven for his own health and safety. Koresh's mother returned when he was seven to regain custody now that she was in a new cohesive marriage to a carpenter. From elementary school and into High School, Koresh suffered from a severe case of Dyslexia causing him to have poor study skills and be placed into special education classes; this was the main source of his suffering to relentless bullying by his classmates and being nicknamed "Vernie" (he resented this name). After years of torment from his classmates, Koresh dropped out of school completely during his junior year at Garland High School. A few years later, at the age of 22, he had an illegal affair with a 15-year-old girl who became pregnant (PBS, Biography: David Koresh, 2014). With years of things not going the way he preferred, he decided to become a born-again Christian and started attending the Southern Baptist Church in Houston. Shortly after, he joined his mother and stepfather in becoming a member of the Church of the Seventh Day Adventists (a Protestant Christian denomination distinguished by its observance of the seventh day of the week – Saturday, "the Sabbath," and its emphasis on the Second Coming of Jesus Christ). While attending the Seventh Day Church, he fell in love with the pastor's daughter. After approaching the pastor to confess the love for his daughter, Koresh was rejected, but still persisted and was then forced to be expelled from the church altogether. From here, in 1981, after a failed attempt at a solo music career in Los Angeles due to a lack of funds and support, David Koresh moved to Waco,

Texas. In Waco he found a new spiritual congregation in the Mt. Carmel Center called the Branch Davidians, run by a man named George Roden. Throughout the next seven years, Koresh widely expanded his growth and trust with the people of the group through his passion and leadership. The greatest opportunity of David Koresh's life came out of an unfortunate turn of events in 1988 when George Roden, the then current leader of the Branch Davidians, was tried and imprisoned for murder of one of the group members for speaking blasphemy. This gave Koresh full control of the Mt. Carmel property in Waco and was appointed by the disciples of the group as the new undisputed leader of the Branch Davidians (*Biography* Editors, David Koresh- Cult Leader, 2017).

#### **Analysis of the Branch Davidians:**

The Branch Davidians, formally the Davidian Seventh-Day Adventists Association, dates its beliefs, traditions, and values back to 1929. It was formed when a man named Victor Houteff created it as a division of/from the Church of the Seventh-Day Adventists. According to the Christian Research Institute (CRI), Houteff's theology for his newly founded group was to "reveal the truth of the 144,000 [people] mentioned in Revelation 7 and bring about a reformation among God's people...a complete symbolic revelation of the entire world's history, both civic and religious" (CRI, *The Branch Davidians*, 2009). The 144,000 people Houteff refers to, from chapter seven of the Book of Revelations in the Bible, were an assembly of Jewish bond-servants to God who were entitled as "The Army of God." In 1935, Houteff led his small group of twelve followers to Mt. Carmel in Waco, Texas, in order to set up what was only supposed to be a temporary gathering place for "The Army of God," their ultimate destination being Palestine, Texas. Palestine is where they believed they would not only direct the final work of the gospel prior to the Second Coming of Christ, but also assist in establishing the new "Davidic Kingdom". It is described that

“The name ‘Davidian’ came from Houteff’s belief that he was the *antitypical David* (when something in Scripture is referred to as a “type,” that means it is a foreshadowing of something in the future. An “antitype” is that future thing itself. For example, the sacrificial systems of the Old Testament served as a “type” for the sacrificial death of Christ [the “antitype”])” (CRI, *The Branch Davidians*, 2009).

The Branch Davidians’ doctrinal beliefs have been divided by the CRI into three basic categories. The first considers those which seem to be a result of the cult’s Seventh - Day Adventist roots, as brought about by Victor Houteff during the developing stages. The second regards those originating with the Roden family generation who ruled the Davidians after Houteff and his wife passed away. The third division is measured by those that came through David Koresh. These were either by “divine revelation” or radical misinterpretation of the Bible, after the last and youngest of the Roden family leaders, George, went to prison.

There is definitely a dramatic transformation of values that is salient between the time Victor Houteff started this denomination in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the time during which David Koresh was appointed leader. Seeing as though these beliefs and values began nearly fifty years prior to David Koresh taking over, the institution had ample time for its values to be lost in translation and diminish through society. Referencing Daniel Stout, this is relative to an article he wrote titled “‘Key Concepts’ in Media and Religion” in which the term “Secularization” is defined as “The theory that religious commitments are generally broken down through interaction with the larger society” (Stout, 2012; pg. 8). Houteff’s doctrines included simple and harmless guidelines such as “Sabbatarianism” (the belief that the seventh-day Sabbath must be observed), vegetarianism, and abstinence from alcohol, tobacco, or drug-use. The Roden family were the first to start implicating more unorthodox ideologies away from the Christian faith, such as strict



fasting policies on certain holidays (including Jewish ones), the Holy Spirit must be identified as a female, and that Lois Roden (George's mother) was the reincarnation of the Holy Spirit. David Koresh's definitive control over the group, after the Rodens' dissipated, is when the teachings led the beliefs to depart the furthest from the dominion of traditional Seventh-Day orthodox ideals. These new implementations elevated The Davidians to a more cult-like status in the eyes of Christian nobles. Koresh applied seven brand new doctrines (completely excluding those employed by Houteff or the Rodens) that really illustrated his disciples' clear devotion as a following. The new policies installed were as follows: "1. The King James Version (KJV) is the only true and uncorrupted translation of the Bible; 2. David Koresh is the only one who can/is allowed to interpret Scripture; 3. David Koresh is the 'antitypical David'; 4. David Koresh is the 'antitypical Cyrus' of Isiah 45 in the Bible, so everything David Koresh does is divined by God (as based on the KJV rendering of Isiah 45:13); 5. David Koresh is 'The Lamb of Revelation (the dual representation of Jesus: a redeemer of self-sacrifice and the judge of man during Salvation); 6. All females in the commune belong to David Koresh, no matter of age or marital status; 7. David Koresh is the reincarnated prophet of Jesus Christ" (CRI, *The Branch Davidians*, 2009). Not one of these doctrines are remotely supported or have been supported in the past by any Christian church denomination in any state in the US. Rules one and four, regarding King James of England, are the only ones that have been seen in history, but not since the 16<sup>th</sup> Century in Europe.

As per the descriptions of doctrines and values given above, via Koresh's control, these new developments qualified the Branch Davidians to be a cult as measured through present-day qualifications in two different respects: by diction and by religious definitions. According to *Christianity Today*, a widely recognized religious magazine company, a "cult" is defined as "...a religion whose beliefs differ from the majority around them...a religious group that is: 1. Exclusive

– conviction that only the given group have the truth, everyone else is wrong (including Christian ideologies), and leaving the given group puts your personal salvation in danger; 2. Secretive – certain teachings are not available to outsiders or they are represented only to certain members, sometimes after taking vows of confidentiality; 3. Authoritarian – a human leader expects total loyalty and unquestioned obedience” (Pastor Shelley, “Defining a Cult,” 2017). There are other characteristics that are mentioned in the text, but they all touch upon these three listed major premises. As published by the *Oxford Dictionary*, “cult” is defined as: “A system of religious veneration and devotion towards a particular figure or object...A relatively small group of people having religious beliefs or practices regarded by others as strange or imposing excessive control over members...A person or thing that is excessively popular or fashionable among a particular group or section of society” (*Oxford Dictionary*, 2017). From a sociological standpoint, all disciples of the group endured typical marks of cult behavior: physical beatings (of men, women, or children), sexual entitlement to all women and young girls, sleep/food deprivation as punishment, and complete isolation from any outside family or ex-members who have been banned. David Koresh manifested himself as an authoritarian/demagogue type of leader who exploited his power over all of those who followed his lead. This type of power will be discussed further in a more in-depth analysis later in this critical inquiry.

### **The Voluntary Indulgence of American People into Cultic Followings:**

Cultic communities across America, specifically those with religious connotation, have mystified other external societies and people (particularly members of religious institutions) as to why average citizens decide to immerse and convert themselves into such estranged followings. The heavy majority of people who have purposefully avoided these types of cultic communities

perpetually raise concerning questions about a person's choice in joining this type of small society.

The most commonly raised question in bystanders regards the motive/attraction of joining a cult. It goes without saying that this decision varies from person to person. However, the most frequently found theme concerns an individual's level of search for personal spirituality and their personal attitude towards general society and religious belief or doubt. According to Robert Wuthnow, in an excerpt from his book *From Dwelling to Seeking*, he argues: "...that a traditional spirituality of inhabiting sacred places has given way to a new spirituality of seeking – that people have been losing faith in a metaphysic that can make them feel at home in the universe and that they increasingly negotiate among competing glimpses of the sacred, seeking partial knowledge and practical wisdom. A consideration of these two kinds of spirituality...also reveals their limitations and provides reason for serious consideration of a third alternative" (Wuthnow, 1998; pg. 3). This explains how people who could not find their niche in a common religious institution become frustrated. They feel there is something missing in its teachings or they have doubt in the sermons being preached. Due to this, some people are forced to investigate deeper into other third-party alternatives that can supply a belief system that satisfies them. However, most of these third-parties are considered taboo in the eyes of popular religious institutions.

There is a noticeable phenomenon amongst cult followers and their undisputed trust in their leader. No matter what the case may be, most dedicated cult followers will, without hesitation, listen, obey, and agree with whatever their leader preaches or acts upon. In the case of David Koresh, he had grown an undeniably strong and positive presence with the people of the Branch Davidians, which had been developed over the course of almost ten years of devotion to the group. Nearly all of the people Koresh ruled over had already been in the group for ten years

or more, which means their dedication and mindsets at this point were virtually irreversible. From the perspective of a follower, in reference to Wade Clark Roof's *The Making of a Quest Culture*: "...primacy is placed...on experience or anticipation of experience, engaging the whole person and activating or reactivating, individuals as well as collective energies. In subtle if not always very explicit ways, such yearnings easily combine sentiments of protest against religious and cultural establishment" (Roof, 1999; pg. 46). The Branch Davidians were a very religious group of people, but, as explained above, much of their devotion to Koresh and to each other rose not only from their incontestable faith in God, but also from the bond and energy they felt with each other that had been growing and getting stronger as time progressed. The point-of-view of the Branch Davidian followers was a mutual contempt for what other Christian denominations preached, as well as having a full conviction that David Koresh was the second coming of the prophet, Jesus Christ, who would guide them to their ultimate goal of divine salvation when Judgment Day arrives.

It is because of the strong passion of belief in their faith, each other, and their common goal of Salvation, that an attempt or execution to leave the group is considered tantamount to treason. Someone who leaves the group would be completely exiled and blacklisted and, at most, be scrutinized and harassed by the other members and the leader. You would not be killed, as is customary in many governed countries or societies (ironically). Concurring with the International Cultic Studies Association (ICSA), it claims in an article titled *Post-Cult After-Effects* by Margaret Thaler Singer, Ph.D of Clinical Psychology, that "After exiting a cult, an individual may experience a period of intense and often conflicting emotions. She or he may feel relief to be out of the group, but also may feel grief over the loss of positive elements in the cult, such as friendships, a sense of belonging, or the feeling of self-worth generated by the group's stated ideals or mission" (Singer,

1979). As suggested in this quote, people who leave cults are more likely to experience a type of PTSD depression called “Post-cult Trauma Syndrome” rather than any further form of harassment or torment from their former cult associates. Singer goes on to explain in the article that it “...is seldom a smooth progression. Not everyone achieves the stage of accommodation/acceptance...Most symptoms [of Post-Cult Trauma Syndrome] subside as the victim mainstreams into everyday routines of normal life. In a small number of cases, the symptoms continue” (Singer, 1979). If you have been shunned from a cult, they generally want nothing more than to never see or hear of you again; no physical harm or blackmail, just complete isolation from the remaining members.

#### **David Koresh as a Demagogue and Authoritarian Figure:**

It is important to note that David Koresh did not achieve limelight with the public until 1993 when he and the rest of the Branch Davidians had their final stand-off with the ATF and FBI. This is primitive information because for nearly five years prior to this nationally broadcasted event, Koresh had been dispersing his corruptive theology on his disciples without a single person of the outside community knowing about it. Just as previous cultic authoritarian figures before him (e.g. Jim Jones or Charles Manson), Koresh used certain propaganda techniques and cultural relevancies of that time period to accomplish astounding influence over his disciples.

In “Ethics and the Demagogue,” by Richard Johannesen lists five characteristics that classify a person as a demagogue: “1. A demagogue wields popular or mass leadership over an extensive number of people; 2. A demagogue exerts primary influence through the medium of the spoken word – through public speaking, whether directly to an audience or via radio or television; 3. A demagogue relies heavily on propaganda defined in the negative sense of international use of

suggestion, irrelevant emotional appeals, and pseudo-proof to circumvent human rational decision-making processes; 4. A demagogue capitalizes on the availability of a major contemporary social cause or problem; 5. A demagogue is hypocritical; the social cause serves as a front or persuasive leverage point while the actual primary motive is selfish interested and personal gain” (Johannesen, 1983; pg. 118). David Koresh definitely exemplifies three, maybe four, of the five characteristics provided. He did not rely on propaganda (number three) and he was not *entirely* a hypocrite, as number five states. Although some of the power he exerted went towards selfish reasons, he was still eerily so convinced that he was the reincarnation of Jesus Christ and that he was divinely in charge of people’s fate when the day of Salvation comes. Relating to the second characteristic, Koresh was extraordinarily effective in influencing the group (via his sermons) that the outside world was turned against them. In *The Making of a Quest Culture*, Wade Clark Roof writes: “Mass culture – a set of ideas and values developed from a common exposure to the same media, news source, art, and music – especially took on an unprecedented influence in human affairs...there emerged a “disjunction” between the techno-economic and cultural realms in a postindustrial society, resulting in an expanded role for expressive symbolism and opening the possibility where, increasingly, cultural innovations would reach much further into peoples’ lives – shaping tastes, styles, fashions, and mindsets” (Roof, 1999; pg. 49). By turning mass culture against the Branch Davidians, it made the followers fearful and paranoid that the only things they can trust are what Koresh demonstrates in his daily sermons and ‘divine’ actions.

From the vantage point of multiple religious institutions or sects, David Koresh would be defined as a radical ‘Homiletician’. In an article from the ICSA called *The Perils of Persuasion* by Duane Liftin, Ph. D. of Biblical Studies and Theology, he defines a ‘Homiletician’ as someone with

“A type of rhetoric technique that treats the composition of delivery in a sermon style of persuasion”. He goes on to explicate that “...homileticians tend to hold that the goal of the preacher is similar to that of the secular persuader, to elicit a desired response from the listener, and that it is quite proper to use a broad range of rhetorical techniques to achieve this goal” (Liftin, *Cultic Studies Journal*, 1985). Koresh attacked the vulnerability of his subordinates in that he knows they would believe in anything he preached during his sermons. This was accomplished through fear of accusations of doubt from him or through paranoia of resentment from the outside world. All of Koresh’s efforts were minimized to being able to “...understand the sources through which people accept belief, so that he can organize his material in such a way to gain the desired response” (Liftin, *Cultic Studies Journal*, 1985). He was a diabolically smart man and a fantastic public speaker who knew how to lift the desires of his subordinates with grand promises, while at the same time accelerating his power over them.

### **Rhetorical Analysis of Comparing and Contrasting David Koresh to George Whitefield:**

George Whitefield is considered to be one of the most influential religious public figures in history who instigated a revolutionary movement to migrate religious teachings from church institutions into the communal streets, where people of all demographics could participate. David Koresh is categorized as a radical religious extremist who used widely misinterpreted morals of the Bible to influence his followers to believe that he was a prophet who was divinely in charge of their Salvation. Although these two idol figures lived in largely separated time periods, and had vastly different motives, they both possessed certain mindsets and a skill in persuasion that paralleled each other in influencing mass audiences.

Harry Stout's text, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (1991), provides abundant information that provides evidence of many such parallels, as well as some clear contrasts. To begin this comparing and contrasting analysis, it is important to understand George Whitefield's impact on society in order to compare David Koresh's on the Branch Davidians. Stout explains in his text that Whitefield was: "...America's most popular eighteenth-century preacher and its first truly mass revivalist..." and "...Anglo-America's first modern celebrity, a preacher capable of commanding mass audiences (and offerings) across two continents, without any institutional support, through the sheer power of his personality" (Stout, 1991; pg. Xiii). David Koresh did not position himself to the public as any sort of celebrity. In fact, he worked very hard to stay out of the limelight. But, as mentioned in the latter part of the quotation provided, as Whitefield was able to accomplish as a preacher, Koresh was also a notoriously personable man amongst his followers who was efficient in impressing and persuading his audience of nearly 100 members. Just as Whitefield did, David Koresh stationed himself as a "...prototypical cultural hero..." (Stout, 1991; pg. XiV). Stout proceeds to elucidate in his text: "Whitefield's American legacy was doubly significant. He not only saved souls and swelled church memberships, but rallied as well as an entire group of disparate and previously unrelated peoples into a common movement for revival, a group that looked to him as its spokesman. Out of his revivals there emerged a...common cultural identity" (Stout, 1991; pgs. XiV-XV). This is arguably the most significantly common thread of relevancy between Koresh and Whitefield. Firstly, David Koresh had definitive belief that, as 'Prophet', he would decide your fate during Salvation, or "...save souls..." as Whitefield claims. Secondly, he did not rally quite as many people as Whitefield was able to, but he *did* give multiple mandatorily attended sermons every day to his approximately 100 followers, which certainly created "...a common movement for



revival,” just as Whitefield accomplished. Thirdly, Koresh was undoubtedly looked upon as the “spokesman.” just like Whitefield was. Finally, as Whitefield was able to execute, Koresh also created an emergence of a “...common cultural identity” of apocalyptic foreseers and enthusiasts of the Book of Revelations from the Bible that encompassed his subordinates.

On the grounds of personality, although much different within basis of psychological reasoning, both Whitefield and Koresh *do* share some minor qualities. One example is exhibited in the text by Harry Stout when he states: “The more I studied Whitefield’s career, the more apparent it became that the very lack of information on his inner and private life supplied important clues to the man” (Stout, 1991; pg. XV). This is relevant to Koresh in that he, too, never revealed his private or early life to any of the Branch Davidian members. It is an arguable sign that he omitted this information out of fear that it would create destructive leverage against him by creating a lineage of thought that would circulate around the group, possibly taking away from his respect and authority. Another example of applicable similarity in their personalities is the way in which their styles strategically and passionately delivered their sermons to their audiences. In agreement with this thought, it is referenced in *The Divine Dramatist* that Whitefield “...transformed the traditional sermon into something different: a dramatic event capable of competing for public attention outside the arena of churches – in fact, in the marketplace” (Stout, 1991; pg. Xvi). Aside from the fact that Koresh did not want any sort of outside public attention (in fear of being imprisoned for several charges of illegal activity), he *was*, however, playing within the religious marketplace in a semi-similar fashion that Whitefield was. The evidence of this is that he was persistently advertising that if the Davidians obey his seven doctrinal beliefs, also known as “The Seven Seals,” then it was promised that each member’s fate would be optimal when their call to Salvation arrives on Judgment Day. A third quality that reciprocates

resemblance between George Whitefield and David Koresh regards the specific techniques of rhetoric used to gain control over a large audience. Stout presents a prominent method that Whitefield used, which is also shown by Koresh: “Contained in this theater-driven preaching was an implicit method of human psychology and homiletics that humankind less as rational and intellectual than as emotive and impassioned...It is the passions that harmonize and coordinate intellect and will. In fact, they control and direct all the faculties” (Stout, 1991; pg. XiX). Both figures preached towards their audiences’ emotions and passions rather than what the audience considers to be rational or ethical.

There is a great contrast between these two figures that is paramount to note because it is what differentiates George Whitfield as a sincere man of good intent and David Koresh as a vicious manipulator of scripture. That is, George Whitefield used the communal public as a marketplace to advertise his religious piety, whereas David Koresh purposefully confined himself and the rest of the Branch Davidians within the Waco, Texas, compound because mass culture resentment and external publicity were a definitive theme throughout his teachings and sermons. Another contrast, which is not as grand but significant nonetheless, is that Whitefield was the “...first in a long line of public figures whose claims to influence would rest on...popularity rather than birth, breeding, or institutional fiat” (Stout, 1991; pg. XiV). This is a dissimilarity in the sense that Koresh was a born-again Christian and then later declared himself to be the actual reincarnation and Second Coming of the prophet, Jesus Christ. This is a contradictive personal claim to power through a sort of re-birth; this is a much different approach than how Whitefield came to power. Although he was an exclusive celebrity-type figure among the Davidians, this was only accomplished via his effective public-speaking abilities on his followers that he was the Prophet and the “Lamb of Revelation.”

But, unlike Whitefield, whose publicity spread like a wildfire through word-of-mouth, Koresh's influence over his disciples on this level of severity took years of development, production, and practice of preach/sermon style delivery.

### **The Media's Reaction to the Siege and Stand-off at The Branch Davidians' Compound:**

In 2000, on the seventh year anniversary of the tragic events that occurred at the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, CBS News came out with a special news report that described the events that unfolded on February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1993: "It all started...with a February, 1993 raid by more than 70 agents from the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms. David Koresh and his followers, The Branch Davians, were known to have a large cache of high-powered weapons. The ATF also suspected that the group had explosives and the parts to manufacture machine guns illegally. When it arrived to search the compound, shooting started almost immediately...Afterward, four ATF agents and six Branch Davidians were dead. The Federal Bureau of Investigation moved in, and a lengthy standoff ensued. For more than seven frustrating weeks, the FBI tried to persuade the Davidians to come out" (CBS News, "What Really Happened at Waco," 2000). Since the event was an ongoing crime-scene investigation, on-sight media outlets were hindered from receiving any pertinent information from law enforcement about what was currently happening inside the compound. This explains why throughout the duration of the 51-day standoff, relevant up-to-date news coverage slowed down; it came to a point where news outlets had little to nothing to report on that had not already been said. However, on April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1993, the final day of the standoff, the media caught another surge of action to cover when the FBI was called in by President Bill Clinton to take action due to unsuccessful efforts by law enforcement of getting the Branch Davidians to surrender and come out of the building.

In light of the new development of the FBI being ordered in by the President to siege and assault the compound, CNN launched a live news feed that lasted approximately thirty minutes (Youtube, "CNN News Coverage 1993 Waco Raid," 2017). The first few minutes of the news feed consisted of the news reporters conversing their opinions with each other regarding the situation, and stating the obvious to their audience on what was being shown on TV. About five minutes into the live feed, at about noon on the final day, the FBI started moving towards the compound with heavily-armored, military-grade vehicles. It is hard to see, but the vehicles break holes into the walls of the building and throw tear-gas through them in an attempt to handicap the members inside so as to force them out of the building to be apprehend. This strategy did not work because the breach ensued more defensive gunfire from members inside. After a few moments of being shot at by the cult, the armored vehicles retreated back to safety to come up with an alternative strategy. At about the thirteenth-minute mark is when mass amounts of smoke is noticed billowing out from the windows of the building. Three minutes later, at the sixteen-minute mark, a full-fledged raging fire, engulfing the building in flames, is now apparent on the feed. It was not until about the twenty-minute mark, that firefighters were seen moving in to put out the fire; a point at which saving the building from completely burning to the ground was a lost cause. The final ten minutes of CNN's live news-feed show the firefighters attempting to put out the fire, and then it cuts out.

The days after the events in Waco taking place, all types of mass media (e.g. television news networks, radio stations, newspapers, and magazines) from most regions of the country were now reporting and summarizing their view and story of what happened. The *New York Times* published an article titled "Death in Waco: The Overview" that read: "David Koresh and more than 80 followers – including at least 17 children – apparently perished when flames

engulfed the sprawling wooden complex on the Texas prairie.” It goes on to describe that “Officials of the Federal Bureau of Investigation said they believed that Mr. Koresh, a self-described messiah who prophesied to his followers that they would meet their end in an apocalyptic confrontation with the law, gave the order to burn the compound down...the fire was set by cult members who poured fuel around the perimeter of the compound and lit matches.” (New York Times, “Death in Waco,” 1993). When the fire was finally put out and the arson investigation crew came in to sift through and analyze the debris, not only did they find the charred bodies of the members who trapped themselves inside, but they also recognized that most of their demises were the result of fatal gunshot wounds and not from smoke inhalation or burns. Considering this new discovery, officials of the FBI claimed in their press conference: “David Koresh, we believe, gave the order to commit suicide and they all willingly followed...the authorities had received reports, apparently from some of the survivors, that the children had been injected with some kind of poison to ease their pain” (New York Times, “Death in Waco” 1993). This information offers interesting expectations for toxicology and autopsy professionals to examine. It also explains why some firefighters reportedly heard singular and sporadic shots of gunfire as they were approaching the compound to suppress the conflagration. In Washington D.C, Attorney General Janet Reno gave a press conference where she admitted guilt on the government’s behalf: “Today was not meant to be D-Day...This was a step forward in trying to bring about peaceful resolution by constantly exerting further pressure to shrink the perimeter ... In hindsight the Government’s plan to assault the heavily armored compound had been a mistake.” Later that evening, she appeared on CNN’s *Larry King Live* to give her statement of justification: “It was based on what we knew then...Based on what we know now, it was obviously wrong” (New York Times, “Death in Waco,” 1993). Proceeding Attorney General Reno’s remarks

stating responsibility and accountability for poor governmental actions, the next few days were filled with public criticism.

This unfortunate series of events has gained notoriety from many independent journalists and journalistic media outlets alike as an example of one of the worst cases of government action in a delicate, faith-oriented situation in American history. A healthy percentage of the critiquing accounts received by the government and local/state police departments of Texas were from religious scholars who condemned the oversight of not calling in religion experts to assist in resolving a crisis where faith was clearly a heavy factor. Under the “Faith” section of *The Deseret News*, a well-known journalistic religion-news service magazine (based out of Salt Lake City), an article was published in 2013 titled “Lessons from Waco: Religion Matters When Dealing with the Nonconventional.” Evident from the article, the author had interviewed many scholars of religion and history about the “Waco debacle,” and nearly all of them agreed on one vital aspect: “...Waco remains a case study on how religious literacy is critical to peacefully enforcing the law in a pluralistic society and...dealing with apocalyptic groups like the Branch Davidians...” (The Deseret News, “Lessons from Waco,” 2013). One person from Houston, Phillip Arnold, a religious studies scholar with an expertise in unconventional faiths, was quoted by the author saying: “They [authorities] kept calling this a hostage situation. But these people were protecting their home. They didn’t want to leave. The Branch Davidians’ resistance wasn’t a matter of guilt or innocence to the law, but an unshakable belief that only God could tell them when to leave. Obedience to God was more important to them than submission to human authority – when the two were in conflict, God was to be obeyed” (The Deseret News, “Lessons from Waco,” 2013). Although the media’s coverage was slow moving, they did the best they could do with the minimal information that they had. It was impressive to learn that the news channels and radio stations had mass

broadcastings to report the story live, but it was even more impressive to observe their developments in research to uncover the missing pieces of the story so as to deliver a full comprehension of the situation leading up to the standoff, what was going on inside the building that was hidden during the standoff, and what impacts the story had on the public world after it was all over.

### **The Final Exposition:**

It is fascinating from a psychological perspective to consider the mind of David Koresh, starting as a distressed young boy and growing into the idol figure that he crafted himself to be. His severely troubled life before immersing himself with the Branch Davidians is not entirely his own fault, but nonetheless, definitely significant when trying to analyze his radically extreme choices as an adult. The product of an accidental teen pregnancy, the absence of his paternal father, the physical abuse he received from his mother's boyfriend as a very young child, the harassment from his peers all throughout school until he dropped out, getting his illegally under-aged girlfriend pregnant, having his church pastor reject his confessed love for his daughter, banishment from his own church as a result of his confessed love, and failing at his dream-career of becoming a musician. All of these misfortunes within such a short time span certainly had an impact on his cultural view of society and the way he digested the quality of life.

David Koresh left his undesired memories in the past and reinvented himself once he became involved with the Branch Davidians. His immersion into this exclusive group made him remember what it felt like to be worth something, to assist in being a part of something bigger than him. It felt like a new home to him, especially because the religious practices of the Branch Davidians were (originally) not that much different from what he and his mother used to practice

at the Church of the Seventh-Day Adventists. By maintaining a personable attitude and sharing passions among common beliefs, he established many new relationships with people, friendships even. So much so that he gained great loyalty from these new relationships because they actually respected and revered what he had to say, something he never had the chance to feel growing up in Houston. And that was his biggest pitfall. This new sensation of being placed on a high pedestal by his peers gave him ecstasy; this diverged his mindset into something tantamount of an addiction in the sense that he perpetually chased opportunities to escalate his social acceptance within the group, which in turn gave him a blissful sense of power and accelerated his self-confidence enormously.

Once leader, Koresh's routine of relentless practice through the nights followed by a couple sermons every day for a few years led to his rhetoric skills in delivery, manipulation, and audience engagement to become frighteningly effective. This, along with a few other things, is why the earlier mentioned comparison to George Whitefield is not so far-fetched. His passionate and persuasive/manipulative rhetoric and religious entelechy towards his disciples in sermons generated an audience response that immediately reciprocated action from them, as well as conserving a stubborn obedience towards him. David Koresh cleverly fashioned a dangerous combination of three qualities: first, being able to read people and audiences and reacting accordingly in order to get desired results from them; second, establishing his stern presence as the unconditional religious authority in charge of the Branch Davidians; third, making it abundantly clear that he is the reincarnated prophet of Jesus Christ. This was the diabolical brilliance of what Koresh was able to accomplish. But his intelligence did not take him far: the stockpile of guns and explosives he and the Davidians had been collecting illegally over the years (in preparation for Judgment Day) caught the very keen eye of the US government. This discovery



by the ATF, as we now know, progressed into an extremely dramatic and tragic series of events that involved: two federal government agencies, the Texas state police department, multiple regions of local police departments, the conflagration of a large ranch-style property, the national attention of all types mass media over the span of months, and the unfortunate deaths of roughly 100 people.

It is clearly observed that the media's actions along with the reactions of the national public coalesced into endless public debate regarding human nature as a whole. It forced the government to re-evaluate its own policy on resolving situations that are fragile, dangerous, and of unusual circumstance. It demonstrated to civil society that given the right amount of push at the right angle, peoples' sense of ethics and morals can be drowned out by a grander scheme (whether for good or for bad). And it presented an argument to religious denominations of whether or not they are by being too quick to judge sin in people and pushing them away even though they are in need of spiritual redemption.

Unfortunately, as forcedly known and lived by the members of the group through Koresh's "Seven Seals," God's word resided within Koresh himself. Therefore, according to this logic, God was the one who told them not to surrender to authorities during the standoff. God was the one who told them to burn the compound down, and, in the end, God was the one who told them to take their own lives. On April 19, 1993, Judgment Day was attained for the people of the Branch Davidian cult: it arrived in the form of an aggressive law-abiding army of nearly 200 assailants leading a convoy of substantial artillery. Dousing the compound in fuel, igniting the flames, and finalizing their own mortality was the last sacrament in reaching celestial deliverance to the holy kingdom. However, if it were possible, it would not be until right after this sacrificial moment that the members of the Branch Davidians would be enlightened with the greatest and most profound

disappointment they could ever fathom. That is: the communal promise of prophetic transcendence into Salvation was nothing more than a well-executed fallacy, which was manipulatively dispersed over a wide demographic of hopeful innocents by a profanely religious autocrat disguised in a cloak of divine intervention.

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# It's Like, A Highlighter: A focus on responses to the 'Focalizer Like' by Matthew Santangelo

## Introduction

Like, you know how sometimes you use a word like, too much, and it is like, kind of annoying but like, you can't think of another way to like, say it? There is a reason for that. The words we use create structure and performs actions in our conversations. Like is used it in a variety of ways during conversations and though there are many ways to use it, we are able to understand which action it is performing due to the structure it creates in our conversations. We understand the difference between like used in a simile, and like when used quote someone or recall an event or describe something. This paper discusses how previous conversation analysis scholars and scholars from other fields have studied the use of like in conversation and talk. With three examples of real conversations, I propose that there is a previously non-discussed, new formation of the term like that appears in everyday conversations, accompanied by new findings regarding the type of responses it prompts. This use of like, and responses prompted by it, acts a highlighter in conversation and is termed the 'Focalizer Like'. This occurrence in conversation will be looked at and analyzed from a conversation analysis perspective, using data gathered and refined by undergraduate, communication students.

In my research, I have found what I believe to be a new instance of the usage of *like* in conversation, where it appears mid-TCU and is immediately followed by a short pause, which can be measurable or unmeasurable. After the appearance of *like* and the pause is an emphasis in the end of the speakers turn or end-TCU. In addition to the pause and finishing of the turn, a

responding speaker makes either a pre-TCU utterance before taking their turn at talk, and/or an acknowledgement targeted towards the highlighted part of the previous speakers turn. In the following examples I focus on this use of the mid-TCU *focalizer like* and how participants in the conversation treat the use of the mid-TCU *focalizer like* with a pre-TCU utterance and/or acknowledgement response. This use of the *focalizer like* with a pause is designed by the speaker to add emphasis to the ending of their turn or to a specific part of their turn. The *focalizer like* also tells the listener that the current speaker's turn is soon coming to an end and is looking for a specific response from the listener. The *focalizer like* is designed to bring focus to a specific part of a turn at talk, and to lead the listener to respond to speaker's emphasis in their turn.

While reading other works on the usage of *like* from conversation analysts' perspectives, it is clear that there are different uses for *like* within turns of talk. *Like* has been studied as a "quotative function," termed as the *be + like*, when explaining what someone said or might have said such as *she was like...*, or *I was like...* (Romaine & Lange, 1991, p. 228). In this use its occurrence is usually in storytelling where a speaker is recalling past events. It has also been found that the same use of *like* is used to indicate what a speaker was thinking in their head in reaction to an event they are recalling (Romaine & Lange, 1991, p. 227). Similarly, Lamerichs et al. (2009) looked into the use of this *be+like* self-quotative type of *like* commonly used among adolescents to recall past conversations and reactions that they themselves or others have had. The research previously done has not covered every type and/or usage of *like*. In my research, I have not found any previous scholarly work to have looked into the use of *like* from a conversation analysis perspective that suggests the use of *like*, accompanied by a pause, acts as a

highlighter during a speaker's turn in talk. I have not found any research on the mid-TCU *focalizer like* from a conversation analysis perspective.

The term *like* has also been examined from a non-conversation analysis lens. *Like* has been described as one of the most common filler words used in daily conversation “which are speech irregularities used in spoken conversation and commonly regarded as superfluous language spoken by careless speakers” (Laserna et al. 2014 p. 2). In other words, the use of *like* in this instance could be removed from the utterance partly because it is seen as pointless and is claimed to be used by speakers who are not of a certain intelligence level. This claim is supported in the research found by Schlee (2008) who concluded that the filler word “is generally more widespread among undergraduates, who use it about twice as much as graduate students.” However, despite the claim that the use of *like* is pointless, other research has shown that there are different uses, or situations under which it is used. For instance, McWhorter (2017) claims there are three distinct types of *like*, two of these types, which he terms “easing like,” and “reinforcing like” have specific functions when used by a speaker.

Other non-conversation analysis research includes the geographical and demographical use of the discourse marker “LIKE” done by Schweinberger (2014). Schweinberger’s work looks into the use of the discourse marker among different varieties of the English language used around the world. His research data shows that there is a correlation between the data and the assumption that younger, and therefore lower educated speakers use the discourse marker more frequently (as mentioned earlier). However, he argues in his section on American English, that even though there is a correlation, it is difficult to prove it because age and generational usage is changing along with language. Finally, Fox & Robles (2010) research looked into the practice of

'it's like...' enactments. They suggest the practice creates a "shared world among participants" (p. 717). They discuss the similarities between "it's like" and "be like" and argue that though both practices have similarities, the two are used to produce different responses and convey different messages.

From a non-conversation analysis perspective, I have found few similarities between the mid-TCU *focalizer like* and previous research, mainly McWhorter's "reinforcing like," which leads me to further believe that the mid-TCU *focalizer like* has not been covered or studied by either conversation analysts nor scholars from other backgrounds such as linguistics and psychology.

## Analysis

### Example 1

In the excerpt below from transcript *Butch Cassidy*, we find a near perfect example of the mid-TCU, *focalizer-like* and pause, followed by a pre-TCU acknowledgement by a second participant.

23 CRS: =he's talkin he's- he talks like he's a [normal guy.]  
24 DAV: [well he's] upset too cuz  
25 shits not ↓working, ther- there's [technicalities\_]  
26 CRS: [Did you hear how] they sent weed  
27 to the- (.) that actually happened.(0.5) somebody sent like, (.)  
28 f::iftee pounds of marijuana to their studio.  
29 DAV: .hhhh Yeh. Probably all for Murray (.) that pothead  
30 CRS: If you watch him on simul- simulcast lately (dude) he just wears  
31 sunglasses >he's probably always fried,<  
32 (1.1)  
33 DAV: tch .hhhh I dunno how they do it.

The scenario presented above consists of friends and/or suitemates, noted as CRS and DAV, sitting on a couch and talking casually in their living space with a third participant acting solely as an out-of-frame listener. The *focalizer like* appears at the end of line 27 and leads into

line 28 with the ending TCU of speaker CRS. In line 27, CRS continues talking after asking a question in lines 26-27 that is unfinished. CRS cuts himself off and pauses briefly before continuing right into recalling the event of sending marijuana to a studio. DAV in response, exhales just enough to be heard and offers an acknowledging variation of ‘yes’ before taking his turn in responding to the marijuana story in line 29. This exhale and “yeh.” with falling terminal intonation is the pre-TCU to DAV’s turn.

Going back to the *focalizer like* we find two things. First, we find a short unmeasurable pause immediately following “like” at the end of line 27. After the pause, CRS puts emphasis on “f::iftee” at the beginning of line 28 and elongates the first letter. The *focalizer like* here is helping to highlight the amount of marijuana that was sent to the studio in CRS’s story. DAV’s response in line 29 is reacting to the highlighted and emphasized part of CRS’s story. The combination of his pre-TCU exhale and “yeh” is the acknowledging part of his turn, and the rest of line 29 is in response, targeting the *focalizer like* and emphasis on “f::iftee.” This example shows a working instance in which the *focalizer like* works and acts as it should.

## **Example 2**

In this next example from transcript *Jenkins* it is a little more difficult to distinguish the *focalizer like* as there seems to be a few that appear in the excerpt. There are in fact two occurrences. In this example, friends and suitemates are sitting in the living area of an apartment talking about traveling and stories involving travel.



180 DRV: do you remember when Celina did the 100 mile hike in  
 181 Ireland?  
 182 KOB: no  
 183 DRV: and like she ran with sheep.  
 184 KOB: noahha (hh.)  
 185 DRV: she literally just frolicked with sheep she had this air  
 186 Bee en bee on the side of the mountain looking over like ,  
 187 all of like (.) Ireland pastures, (.) >andther- shejust<  
 188 like hiked with sheep  
 189 KOB: pffbbt  
 190 DRV: and there was a ↑guide ↓dog that lived on a farm nearby,  
 191 that like, (.) would walk like the whole strip of the  
 192 trail with everyone that comes by, (.) her name was like  
 193 (.) maisey or something.

---

DRV brings up how a story about a friend who we assume other participants know based on context and the lack of description of who Celina is. DRV explains in 183 how Celina had stayed in Ireland and “ran with sheep.” This point is repeated twice more but with different rewordings during the entire exchange, first appearing in line 183, then 186-187, and finally in 188.

Before we can get into the usage here, we must understand the excerpt as a whole. Here we see an adjacency pair, or talk that “is organized into sequences of paired actions” (Sidnell, 2015, p. 63). An adjacency pair is co-constructed by two speakers, and “ordered as a First Pair Part (FPP) and a Second Pair Part (SPP)” (Sidnell, 2015, p. 64). In this case, the FPP is delivered by the speaker DRV in line 180 where they prompt the other participants with a question. DRV’s turn does not end until line 193. This entire excerpt is during DRV’s turn. All though KOB makes responses while DRV speaks, KOB does not take a full turn at talk, as DRV continues to tell this story about their friend. As Sidnell (2015) states, “A single turn-at-talk may be built out of several TCU’s” (p. 41). Sidnell also tells us that participants “project” the end of a speaker’s turn. This is seen between lines 188 and 190 where speaker KOB reacts to DRV’s mid-TCU lines 185-188. This is where we find one of the *focalizer likes*.

The *focalizer like* in 188 is responded to by KOB in 189 with the ‘pffbbt’ utterance. KOB’s response targets the running with sheep utterance with her displays of acknowledgement in lines 184 and 189, immediately following each focalizer like. Both the ‘noahha’ and ‘pffbbt’ are reactions to DRV’s telling of how Celina ran with sheep. DRV uses the *focalizer like* to highlight the fact that Celina ran with sheep. The repetition of her stating that Celina ran with sheep shows that she wanted it to be emphasized and heard by the listeners. In two of the three rewordings of how Celina ran with sheep, DRV uses two *focalizer likes*. DRV designed the mid-TCU of her turn to get a reaction from her listener(s) by using the *focalizer like*.

### Example 3

This following excerpt is from the same transcript as Example 2 featuring the two previous speakers DRV and KOB as well as two new speakers JAK and CAS. The group is talking about food from different countries while in their living room area.

71 KOB: [I just googled Croatia]=  
 72 DRV: [u::m Katie [I had- ] ]  
 73 JAK: [They’re] [like Greece ]  
 74 KOB: =[ooh lots of] fish ha:h  
 75 JAK: [ye:ah]  
 76 DRV: [I watc]hed a:: documentary about Russian food how it  
 77 doesn’t Have an identity and like, chefs have to like .hh  
 78 be challenged to like bring back the traditional Russian  
 79 food  
 80 CAS: ↑hmm  
 81 KOB: umm a lot [of uhhhh sausages] ? a::nd u:hm  
 82 DRV: [its so weird, it’s gross too]  
 83 CAS: ye::ah |

Here we find a more complex *focalizer like* in lines 77-78. DRV is explaining a documentary that discussed traditional Russian food and its struggle to bring it back. While explaining the documentary, DRV uses a complex *focalizer like* comprised of 3 individual uses of the *like*. DRV uses the *focalizer likes* to add emphasis onto how the Russian chefs have to bring back traditional

food. DRV designs the mid-TCU of the turn to get a reaction from the listeners similar to the previous example. DRV achieves this when CAS responds with “hmm” in line 80 which shows intrigue to the explanation. CAS’s utterance in line 80 targets DRV’s emphasis of how the chefs are ‘challenged.’ This is CAS’s acknowledgement as her turn.

Similar to example 2, it is difficult to distinguish the structure of this example. At first glance it may seem that the mid-TCU *focalizer like* does not occur mid-TCU and rather in the end-TCU of DRV’s turn. However, I argue that in line 82, DRV’s end-TCU turn is an expansion to the adjacency pair made up by DRV and CAS in lines 76-80. A post-expansion as Sidnell (2011) states, “can occur after a second pair part and thus minimally expand the sequence” (p.104). This post-expansion comes after CAS’s ‘hmm’ in line 80 which is the SPP to the adjacency pair. DRV’s line in 82 reflects example 24 (p. 107) from Sidnell (2011) in which Sidnell explains that “the sequence is expanded by a short assessment sequence” (p. 107). DRV’s assessment of the documentary is line 82.

To simplify and recap, DRV’s turn begins in line 72, in the middle of overlapped talk by multiple speakers, attempting to start the explanation of the documentary. The mid-TCU is found at lines 76 through 79 where DRV explains the documentary and uses the mid-TCU *focalizer likes* to add emphasis and highlight the challenge in the documentary. After CAS’s acknowledging response in line 80 targeted towards what was highlighted, DRV’s turn ends with the end-TCU in line 82 which is an “assessment sequence” in response to the documentary. The turns are completed by CAS’s response with an elongated ‘yeah’ to cap the end of the expanded sequence.

## Discussion

The mid-TCU *focalizer like* is a tool used by a speaker to highlight a particular part of the speaker's turn in which they design specifically to get a certain response from a listener. The highlighting of the particular parts is done by adding a small emphasis after the term *like* either by tone and intonation or through small pauses. These pauses, which Sacks et al. (1974) dictate as breaks during a TCU, are long enough to be noticeable but not long enough for listeners to interject. This practice is found in the middle of a turn constructional rather than other uses of *like* which appear in the beginning or end of a TCU. The expected responses are to be targeted towards the highlighted and emphasized parts of the FPP or the first speaker's utterance. These utterances we are going to call "Minimal Acknowledgement Tokens," or MATs for short. These MATs, are supporting proof of the *focalizer like's* function in conversation. The *focalizer like* is a tool, much like other actions and practices, that is used by a speaker to designate the direction in which the conversation will go. It is another constructional tool that is seen widely in American English speakers.

## Conclusion

This paper looked into a new, previously un-discussed type of *like* within talk from a conversation analysis perspective. The mid-TCU *focalizer like* is one type of *like* that has not been discussed before especially from a conversation analysis perspective. The examples in this paper have shown that the use of the *focalizer like* is not only common among American English speakers, but also has varying complexities that we understand when we hear them. The *focalizer like* works to focus the listener's attention to a specific point in a speaker's turn and set them up to respond in an agreeing manner and/or build off of that specific highlighted point.

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# #AerieMAN: An Analysis

by Grace Smith

Aerie, a lingerie and swimwear brand, is a sub-brand of clothing retailer American Eagle Outfitters. In 2014, Aerie revealed its new ad campaign titled #AerieREAL. The company announced its intentions to stop using supermodels in its ads, as well as a promise to leave all of their photos un-retouched in a move to support body positivity. The campaign was met with much praise and positivity from consumers, and the #AerieREAL movement continues to be at the center of many Aerie ads. In 2016, Aerie announced that it would be expanding the movement to include men in a campaign titled #AerieMAN. However, on April 1 the company released a statement that classified #AerieMAN as an April fools joke. While the original release of #AerieMAN was applauded, this sudden turnaround was responded to with much chagrin from consumers who felt as though they had been duped. Although Aerie later announced that the April fools prank was intended to raise awareness for men having a positive self-image, many felt as though the company had made a joke out of male body positivity. With the #AerieMAN ad campaign Aerie exemplified that while there exists a growing desire for positive representations of the male body in the media, there is still an unwillingness to take male body positivity seriously.

#AerieMAN was introduced on March 24, 2016 following the great success of the #AerieREAL campaign. The ads featured four men of varying body types and ethnicities posing in Aerie brand boxers and briefs. There were no actual products rolled out, but they released a video showcasing their new models, as well as posting photos on their Instagram and revamping the Aerie website to focus on #AerieMAN. The men were pictured playing with puppies, reading

books, and lounging around in their underwear. In the video, one model states “It’s kind of empowering to know [that] my flaws are gonna be embraced” (ABC News 2016). The faux ad used the same slogan given to the #AerieREAL campaign, “The real you is sexy.” Before Aerie announced that the ad was intended as a parody, many customers responded positively. The context for them was that Aerie was releasing the first fashion campaign that was focused on embracing the male body in all its shapes and sizes; that was seen as a good thing, as though male body positivity had slowly been gaining support as a social issue at the time, it hardly had the same place in the mainstream as female empowerment did, and still does. Dove, Nike, and Lane Bryant all run ads that focus around female empowerment and self-love, but not a single one does the same for men. Therefore, there was widespread acceptance of the ad campaign. The overarching meaning of the ad was the male body positivity was valid, and just as important as it is for females.

The context changed, however, when Aerie revealed that #AerieMEN was just an April fools joke. Now the campaign that started off as a trailblazer for male body acceptance held a different meaning; it became a negative thing that seemed to be mocking the very idea it was once promoting. For a brand that had so long promoted body positivity for women to make a joke out of the same issue for men spurred much discontent among their consumer base. Aerie then released a statement stating that “This announcement marks the brand's pledge to forego retouching its male models in its underwear and swim images beginning holiday 2016,” and furthermore that “American Eagle Outfitters has donated \$25,000 to NEDA, a non-profit that supports those affected by eating disorders and an ongoing partner with Aerie” (ABC News 2016). This again changed the context for some. The campaign had gone from a widely praised venture to a bad joke, but now for some it seemed that #AerieMAN may have simply been an act of poor

PR scrutiny. Now the meaning of the ads was more muddled. Some still felt that the negative implications created by the reveal of the ad as a joke showed that the meaning of the ad was that male body positivity is not important, and in fact, is something that should be made fun of. In fact, the meaning was perhaps one of disempowerment for men. Others took the news of Aerie's move to stop photo-shopping male models to show that the meaning was not negative, but perhaps simply misconstrued; the meaning for them became that male body positivity and empowerment is important, but it is still not taken as seriously as it is for females.

The intended audience of #AerieMAN was its consumer base, women aged 16-22, as well as men of the same age range who shop at American Eagle Outfitters. Additionally, Aerie had likely hoped that their campaign would go viral and as a result attract new customers, likely from the same age demographic. The meanings in the ad that were well received initially, that body positivity for men is important and valuable enough to create an entire running campaign about, were intended to reach and appeal to everyone in this demographic, and hypothetically beyond. For the week that #AerieMAN was running before it was revealed as a spoof, many accepted these intended meanings and showered the campaign in praise. On Twitter, men and women in the target demographic shared their delight that a mainstream ad campaign was choosing to focus on this important issue for men, as so many had done for women. #AerieMAN was essentially accepting male body positivity as valid, which was a great implication for men who had perhaps struggled with that very issue in the past. The initial acceptance of #AerieMAN in the 16-22 demographic was no surprise, as social justice for under-represented and struggling groups is currently an important cause for many from their early teens to late twenties.

The structure of #AerieMAN implied a preferred subject position for the customer base;



ideally, customers would see the ad, find humor in the fact that it contained men posing for boudoir style photos, and praise Aerie for bringing an under represented issue to light. As was stated in their response to the criticism, “We know our male customers respond to humor” (ABC News 2016). However, most people did not recognize the intended humor, though they did applaud the company for the supportive ads; most consumers only aligned with that half of the preferred subject position. When the campaign that had been regarded as serious was revealed as a joke, many took a subversive stance to the campaign, viewing it as a negative influence on an important issue and certainly not finding any of the humor in it that was intended. Aerie had assumed that the humor would be clear in the initial release, and that the April fools reveal wouldn’t be shocking. However, the ad had filled a need for the consumer base and by flipping the script the intended humor did not come across as funny, but underhanded, and even mean. This caused the desire for many to take that subversive stance against the ads. When Aerie announced that their donation plans as well as their plans to stop photo-shopping male models, some decided that the company’s intentions were good and again felt more positively towards the whole idea. Still no one was taking on Aerie’s entire preferred subject position; most felt that the humor was in bad taste.

#AerieMAN was intended to be a humorous ad campaign that would draw attention to both the brand and the issue of male body positivity. Unfortunately, that objective was not met and the ads ended up having a largely negative effect on the issue and the brand, despite Aerie ultimately making some positive steps by vowing to no longer photoshop their male models. The reactions to the campaign proved that a serious version of #AerieMAN would be well received

and applauded, and that the need exists. Ultimately, #AerieMAN proved that although there are steps being made to support male body empowerment, it is still susceptible to being seen in a comedic light in a way that female body empowerment would never be.

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# Living Life on the Fringe: Examining how the internet has enabled the growth of the serial killer fringe fandom

by Grace Smith

For as long history goes back, humans have been looking for ways to connect with one another, despite the condemnation that society places on certain activities and beliefs. Like speakeasies during prohibition, people are wont to look for places that are relatively free from public dissent where they can share in desires and interests that might be unpopular. Enter the internet, which at its peak today exists as a place for billions of people to make connections based on existing interests or discover entirely new pursuits, no matter how unusual or unsavory. If enough people with a similar interest, no matter how unconventional, can find one another they will likely form a fandom. Although naturally smaller than fandoms focusing on blockbuster movies or Grammy-winning artists, fringe fandoms, like the serial killer fandom (a group that finds great interest, and even attraction, in the lives and deaths of serial killers) can catch the public eye just the same, although likely more so through shock value than sheer mass. The serial killer fandom, a group that idealizes and find intrigue in a topic that is shunned by society is a fantastic example of groups that have been strongly facilitated by the introduction of the internet and technology as a whole. The features offered by the internet such as anonymity, the ability to connect more easily with those who hold similar ideals, and a place to share original content that enable it to be shared with a wider audience, create an alternative space to the reality we have been a part of thus far.

*"I was attracted to him physically, I am not going to lie. There was something compelling about him."*

*“Can you imagine how cute [he] would have been on a date, like seriously I bet he would have tried really hard and got flowers and everything the cutie.”*

*“Listening to [his] interview as I fall asleep makes me feel closer to him. Like we’re having a late night conversation in his bed.”*

Sans context, these comments seem unlike any others that one might see on a given internet forum, young people fawning desperately over the latest celebrities, hoping to somehow form significant connections with the objects of their affections. Additional information reveals the disturbing truth behind the posts- each comment is written by a young woman in reference to a specific serial killer.

The serial killer fandom is made up of mostly young women, all of whom find themselves drawn in some way to the world of true crime. Many members of the fandom refer to their group as the true crime community, although that term is generally used to refer a larger group with an interest in crimes and criminals, and the serial killer fandom appears to be more of a subset of the larger whole. The majority of the fandom is confined to Tumblr, where one can find a network of blogs with names such as jeffery-is-a-babe (referring to serial killer Jeffery Dahmer), columbineismyaesthetic, and serialkillerslover. These blogs post content ranging from informational posts detailing the crimes and life histories of serial killers (fig. 1), to memes (fig. 2), to original fan art depicting famous serial killers like Jeffery Dahmer and Richard Ramirez (fig. 3). The most ‘popular’ serial killers among the fandom are Richard Ramirez, aka The Night Stalker, who murdered more than a dozen people (Crime Museum), Jeffery Dahmer who killed and cannibalized 17 young men (Barron & Tabor), and Ted Bundy who confessed to the murders of 28 women (Jenkins). Although other killers like Ed Kemper and John Wayne Gacy, both older, less

conventionally attractive men, are not ignored, most of the fan art, stories, and professions of attraction are geared towards Dahmer, Ramirez, and Bundy. Most members of the serial killer fandom condemn the behaviors of the killers, but at the same time seem to hold a level of sympathy for them, as members post frequently about difficult childhoods endured by the killers, lamenting that arduous life experiences are the true reasons behind the majority of the killers' actions. For some members, the interest goes beyond sympathy and moves into the realm of genuine attraction and affection. The aforementioned most popular killers among the serial killer fandom, Bundy, Dahmer, and Ramirez, are also some of the younger, and arguably more conventionally attractive well known serial killers. Some members proclaim to not have a sexual interest in the killers, but the majority appear to harbor at least some type of attraction, as evident by posts like one by columbineismyaesthetic that proclaims "Calling serial killers attractive doesn't mean we are romanticizing. That just means that we're calling them attractive nothing more than that." (fig. 4) Some members define themselves as hybristophiles, or people who derive attraction from a partner who has committed crimes, such as murder. A 17-year-old Australian girl confirmed the phenomenon when she was interviewed for a Vice article on the subject of the serial killer fandom, stating "I'm sexually attracted to people who have committed violent crimes...I think my favorites are the ones who were into necrophilia" (Surtees).

Young women professing attraction to criminals, serial killers specifically, is not a new phenomenon. At Ted Bundy's 1979 trial in Miami, Florida, there was a number of college-aged female spectators that both filled the courtroom and waited outside. When questioned, she of the women conceded that while they were afraid of or unsettled by Bundy, "they also admitted that they were fascinated by him, even if they were unsure as to why" (Barnes). Clearly, the

behavior exhibited by these women in 1979 has not gone away. In fact, it is likely that the number of young women who find themselves sharing similar sentiments with those in the serial killer fandom has increased with the introduction of the internet and subsequently Marshall McLuhan's concept of the global village. The global village illustrates how technology enabled the vastness of the world to shrink as physical location was overstepped by commonalities in terms of important factors when forming relationships. Physical location used to be the most important element when it came to creating relationships, and rightfully so. Before technology there was slim to no chance to connect with a person outside of one's physical realm; there was simply no reliable way to meet people, first of all, and then keep up a relationship across great distances.

Enter the internet; first, email and eventually instant messaging and video chatting allowed established relationships to have new ways to keep in touch when separated. Additionally, and perhaps more notably, the internet became a hub through which people are able to form new connections. Today's internet users have a host of places to meet new people through similar interests, as well as discover and nurture new interests. Likewise, this has allowed the serial killer fandom to come about and likely grow in members as people stumble across related content online and feel like they can connect to it. There are many posts under the hashtag #serialkillerfandom where users reach out in hopes to connect with other members of her fandom. For example, a post by user alonegettinghigh stated "If anyone is down to become Tumblr buddies, hmu. I need people who have the same interest as me to talk to."

Just like many other fandoms, members of the serial killer fandom express their interest in the main parties of their fandom (usually movie characters or artists, but in this case serial killers) by creating original content. Fan art (fig. 5), comics, memes (fig. 6), and fanfiction all exist within

the fandom network on Tumblr. Creators post content semi-regularly, and it usually will be shared and liked by like-minded blogs generating hundreds or thousands of notes, which count the total number of likes and reblogs on Tumblr. There are countless content creators within the serial killer fandom. User ramirezmariee66, who claims that her last two blogs have been deleted by Tumblr, states in a post “I write short stories, fan fiction, and imagines about any and all serial killers. I’m back and I’m taking any and all requests! Feel free to ask me to write whatever you like, I do not judge.” They do not post examples of their work on their Tumblr blog and state that they will directly message any stories to the requester, likely out of fear of having their blog deleted a third time. Another user under the name richeramirezfanfiction posts original stories exclusively involving serial killer Richard Ramirez. User psychopathicneighbor is a popular poster of hand-drawn comics that detail life events of serial killers, usually depicting them committing miscellaneous murders (fig.7). The content creation within the serial killer fandom is reminiscent of Henry Jenkin’s concept of neo-folk culture. Folk culture is thought of as small, homogenous groups that co-habited in one physical arena, much in line with past definitions of communities where each person kept inter-dependent relationships with one another. These groups would often entertain with song and dance, and those traditional songs and dances would be passed down among generations often having lyrics and dance steps changed along the way. As a result, when society today looks back on traditional song and dance it can be hard to pin down a single true author. Neo-folk culture is the idea that the same muddled idea of authorship is applicable today in fan culture (Jenkins). Just like the serial killer fandom, many larger and more prolific fandoms like Harry Potter or The Hunger Games are creating their own content to continue on the original story in their own words. Although the serial killer fandom doesn’t truly have one main storyline or piece of media they are working off of, members of the fandom appear to be

inspired to create simply from the true stories of individual serial killers, perhaps in the form of documentaries or TV shows that are made about the killer's lives. As such, the serial killer fandom quite clearly represents neo-folk culture, although their content is much more underground and less viewed than that coming from mainstream fandoms.

Another aspect of the internet that has allowed for the growing of the serial killer fandom and other fringe fandoms is anonymity. For people who consider themselves to be a part of a fringe fandom and want a safe place to discuss their interests without significant outside judgment, the internet can be a godsend, although in today's world we view it as a common tool of daily living. If one is careful, they can hide their identity almost completely online and use their new persona to pursue whatever they wish. The concept of anonymity comes with the change in the definition of community. Anonymity would not have been feasible back when communities were contained in one physical location, where most relationships were interdependent, and for the most part, everybody really did know everybody. As people began to migrate and spread out across larger cities and technology eventually came along changed the way in which people view relationships and how to maintain them, anonymity became a real possibility (McLuhan & Powers). In some ways, anonymity allows individuals to be their truest selves. Free from the shackles of social convention and the ties of personal relationships, people can pursue whatever interests they desire online without fear of significant backlash. However, the vast library of information that the internet offers can pull individuals in a direction that is perhaps far past what they originally desired to see. While living beyond social convention can free people in many ways, it can be easy to forget that it exists for a reason. Anonymity that removes the fear of consequences can encourage individuals to create and share disreputable content; on the other



side of the coin, browsing the internet anonymously can lead people to subversive content that they didn't even realize they were interested in seeing until it caught their eye. This is not necessarily negative, but some content, like hardcore pornography, has been proven to affect many individuals lives in an adverse manner. In the same way, it is possible that an impressionable person could be affected negatively by coming across the serial killer fandom by taking the content to be approving of serial killers' actions. It is difficult to know, however, how often a negative influence like that actually occurs in contrast to the serial killer fandom providing a positive outlet for individuals who are invested in the topic and find camaraderie among others who feel the same while still condemning the killers' actions. Opinions shared online are not free from backlash, but it is undeniably easier to get away with a possibly inflammatory comment on the internet than it is in real life, as a person's exact identity is more easily hidden and other random internet users usually won't have a previously established relationship with the original poster. Having an online profile with a bad reputation is much different from having the same happen to an individual's true identity. However, it is possible to track down an anonymous user and connect their internet presence to their real-life identity. That practice, now referred to as doxxing, has gotten more and more popular as many believe that individuals should be held accountable and face real-life consequences for harmful remarks that they make online. Doxxing is usually put into practice for individuals who make incendiary comments related to race, religion, or sexuality, but it doesn't seem totally unlikely for a person to be doxxed simply based on interests or beliefs that another individual finds unsavory.

While the internet has allowed for more freedom when it comes to exploring niche interests, certain websites have been on a mission to prove lately that they are anything but a

free-for-all. In November, blogging website Tumblr, the internet home for most of the serial killer fandom, announced that on December 17th the platform would no longer allow adult content and set all existing posts that violated the new policy to 'private', meaning that the posts would now only be able to be viewed by their original poster. Adult content is somewhat difficult to define, but the press release for the content ban refers to it as "photos, videos, or GIFs displaying explicit material" (Romano). The ban was originally formulated after Apple removed the app from the App Store following the discovery of child porn on Tumblr's platform (Romano). In the days since the ban was announced, Tumblr has proven themselves to be unstable, flagging many posts that one would be hard-pressed to identify as adult content, such as baby animals. However, many blogs and individual posts belonging to members of the serial killer fandom have been flagged or deleted. Tumblr has proven their algorithm to be less than perfect, but one can assume that blogs which frequently discuss details of grisly murders and post pictures of bloodied murder victims do count as posters of explicit material and were not flagged incorrectly. Under the hashtags #serialkillerfandom and #truecrime, there is a multitude of posts lamenting about the 'purge' of explicit posts on Tumblr. One user under the moniker sinisterlolita posted "Since I fear that Tumblr is going to start flagging True Crime Community related things, is there another place you guys are planning on going? This has been my only source of this "community" interest and I'll be deeply saddened not to be able to read the informational posts by you guys. Other users posted usernames for other social media sites like Instagram or Deviant Art where they planned to begin posting instead of Tumblr. The reaction of members of the serial killer fandom to the mass deletion of much of their content from Tumblr proves the strong desire that many have to be a part of a community where they can share about a topic they enjoy and would likely be ostracized for discussing with many people they have relationships with outside of the internet

community. In many ways, Tumblr seems somewhat vital to the survival of the serial killer fandom. For a long time, Tumblr acted as their home base, and members of the fandom have become used to the website format and have established multiple popular and well-run blogs in their community. Starting on a different platform could mean losing members from the frustration of having to essentially rebuild the community if enough blogs get deleted, or having to deal with a different format on a new website that may not work as cohesively with the fandom's method of posting and sharing content as Tumblr has up until this point. Regardless of whether the content purge might kill the fandom, it is undeniable that it will cause a shake-up that will likely cause more harm to the fandom than good.

From the point of view of the members of the serial killer fandom, harm befalling the fandom is, of course, a negative event. However, there are certain groups and individuals that are of the opinion that the destruction of the serial killer fandom would be a positive thing. Members of the fandom tend to see their group as a collection of like-minded individuals who have an interest in the lives of serial killers, and usually, have some sort of attraction or endearment to one or more serial killers. On the contrary, many outsiders view the fandom as a group of sexual deviants who glorify serial killers and even condone their actions. While many fandom members would surely disagree with this definition of their group, it is undeniable that there are many posts within the network of serial killer fandom blogs on Tumblr that appear to make excuses for the actions of serial killers, or straight up revere them (fig. 8). Many pro-serial killer posts have, however, already been hidden or deleted from Tumblr. Regardless of whether or not individuals in the serial killer fandom actually condone the crime, creating an environment where individuals who have committed unspeakable crimes seem to be glorified can be toxic and can certainly

come across as condoning whether or not that is the actual intent. Individuals may be able to claim that they know better than to actually support serial killings, but it is easily possible for an individual to stumble across these posts and start to believe that some people do support the actions of these serial killers, and perhaps they should as well. Those against the serial killer fandom also state that posting photos of the corpses of the victims of these crimes is disrespectful to the victims and their living family members. All this considered, it begs the question of whether or not possibly inflammatory content should be allowed on mainstream sites. Tumblr isn't the only site doing a purge, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have all gotten more strict in terms of the posts that they allow through their algorithms, and still, some users don't believe that they are being strict enough. The internet has provided a place for fringe fandoms to thrive. By providing an easier way to make connections based on commonalities, the chance to have anonymity, and a stage on which to share original content creations, the internet gave individuals a perfect storm to support them as they explored off-the-wall interests and created groups to share with those who have similar interests. However, an increasingly anxious climate has begun to bring holds down on these fringe fandoms, and some parts of them have seemingly begun to deteriorate. Bans started with wider issues such as child pornography and racist statements but have trickled down to include all explicit material. The future of fringe fandoms on popular internet platforms seem unsure, but the future of fringe fandoms as a whole should not come into question. These groups existed before the birth of popular websites and the internet as a whole, and although the internet had helped them thrive and grow, whether they must retreat to a deeper corner of the online universe or abandon the internet altogether, fringe fandoms will not disappear entirely. There will always be people interested in unsavory matters that society generally frowns upon, and that is an aspect of humanity that will never change.

fig. 1:



fig. 3:



fig. 2:



fig. 4:



fig. 5:



fig. 7:



fig. 6:

## Me on a date

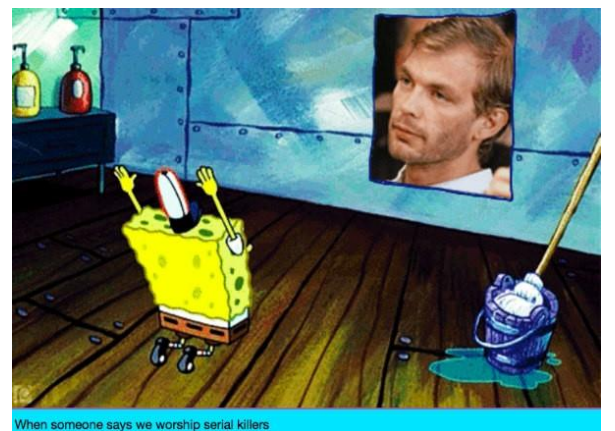
Date: So, what are you interested in?

Me: \*don't say serial killers, don't say serial killers\*

Me: School shooters.

In your orbit #serial killers  
 #school shooting #school shooters  
 #massacre #eric harris #dylan klebold

fig. 8:



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